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Transformative
Women
Leaders
in Myanmar
Society
(English Version)

TRANSFORMATIVE

Women Leaders in Myanmar Society (2)

CONTENT

● Politic, Peace and Leadership

1. **Daw Aye Aye Win**
Former Senior Staff of AP News Agency for Myanmar 8
2. **Naw May Oo**
Little White Dove of Peace 14
3. **Ying Lao**
With High Moral Value for Living Together in Peace 18
4. **Mai Len Nei Cer**
Chin Woman Leader of Ninu (Women in Action Group) 24
5. **Director Christina Kyi**
The Transformation of Myanmar Film Industry 30

● Health and Sports

6. **Dr. Thet Su Htwe**
Sexuality Education Provider 36
7. **Daw Thein Thein Aye**
FIFA-Recognized Referee 42
8. **Voronica**
Kayan Lady Boxer 46

● Education

9. **Mi Sar Tar**
Supervisor of Mon National Education Center,
the New Mon State Party 52

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- | | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 10. | Chit Hnin Pwint & Chit Moc Pwint
Twin Sisters from the Technology Field | 58 |
| 11. | Sweet
Female Tattoo Artist | 64 |

● **Business**

- | | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 12. | Ma Shwe Yamin Oo
Advocate for the Recyclables | 58 |
|-----|---|----|

● **Social and Others**

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 13. | Daw Kathleen Thein
From Tutor to Philanthropist | 74 |
| 14. | Venerable Daw Oak Tama Sari
Advocate of Social Work for the Common Good | 78 |
| 15. | Daw Tingba Kai Ra
Tower of Strength for Jade Scavengers | 84 |
| 16. | Daw Nyunt Nyunt Thein
Steerswoman of the Mary Chapman Training College for Teachers and School for the Deaf | 88 |
| 17. | Ma May Aye Thandar Kywel or Ma Suu Chit
Initiator of We are Mandalay Campaign with Respect for Diversity | 94 |
| 18. | Ma Yin Min Thant
Chef with a Pair of Tasteful Hands without Silence | 100 |
| 19. | Ma Thu Zar Win
Steering Woman of Taw Win Kayay | 104 |
| 20. | Ma Myat Yee Mon
YBS Driver | 110 |

PRODUCTION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Gender Equality Network is actively working for the promotion of women rights and gender equality in Myanmar. Hence, we have had many opportunities to acquaint with many amazing women who have excellent capability and leadership skills and most important of all, bravery and are working in diverse professions in the country. We have many lessons learnt from their experiences, technical expertise, and challenges they faced in their respective fields.

Despite their achievements, they do not receive adequate recognition and honor for their significant contribution and good work. Their grandeur and leadership are also forgotten to be documented properly and are not even included in text books and bedtime stories. Historical documentation always portray men as martyrs, leaders and heroes. It is very unfortunate that there are limited women role models for our women and girls.

It is for this reason that GEN had published this 'Transformative Women Leaders in Myanmar Society' Volume 1, in which 20 different women leaders were portrayed, with the support of Mizzima Media in 2017. Again, we proudly document and honor another 20 wonderful women who are actively leading in different sectors in transformative ways and may be considered as role models, with this 'Transformative Women Leaders in Myanmar Society' Volume 2, in 2019. We believe this book will contribute to creating an enabling environment for our women and girls to utilize their capacities fully.

GEN would like to show our heartfelt thanks to each and every woman leader in this book for sharing their life experiences, including challenges relating to the ups and downs in life, twists and turns, and how they have successfully overcome these challenges. We hope the readers can learn from these stories and understand better of their struggles and their resilience. Much appreciation is extended to Mizzima Media, our partners, individuals and organizations for their contributions to be able to publish this book.

Gender Equality Network

FOREWORD

“**W**omen in Myanmar Society” is a weekly program produced by Mizzima Media and broadcast on Myanmar Radio & Television (MRTV). “With Great Leadership and Capacity” refers to Myanmar women from various fields, who have shown their great leadership and capacities in Myanmar society.

You can see that the women featured in this book have courageous character, leadership skills, great talent and international competence that arise out of the motherly attitude. You can also see their efforts for the development of the region, the country and the whole public.

There are still so many brave and outstanding Myanmar women with great leadership and capacity. However, only 20 women in diverse fields have been selected and mentioned proudly in this book.

Let me also express my words of thanks with regard to the book entitled “Women in Myanmar Society with Great Leadership & Capacity”. First and foremost, my sincere thanks go to the 20 women who have patiently shared their experiences in order to inspire other women. We could not make it without their participation. Next, my heartfelt thanks go to Gender Equality Network for their encouragement to make a book out of the programs broadcast on TV and other organizations for their support. Last, but not least, I would like to thank Kamayut Media for the kind help with their article “Woman Bodybuilder Nang Laung Kham” and all the colleagues for their efforts in the successful implementation of this book.

Mizzima

DAW AYE AYE WIN

Former Senior Staff of AP News Agency for Myanmar

Daw Aye Aye Win was born in Yangon on 10th December, 1953. Her father is U Sein Win, a newsman from AP news agency. She has inherited journalism from him. She started working at AP news agency in 1989. At that time, she was the first woman journalist working for a foreign news agency. She has been well-known for her dedication to the freedom of press. She has also been awarded with a variety of prizes related to journalism. In 2015, she retired from her profession. We got to know her life in detail during the interview.



*They noticed me
and shouted through
the loud speaker like this-
“Daw Aye Aye Win,
get out of the way!”*





Photo: Hlaing Myo Tun

Childhood Memories

We have four siblings in our family and I am the third one. My mother is quite an important person in my life. She's a doctor. As for my father, he's a newsman. He is also important for me as he is such an inspiring person. I followed his steps. I inherited the brave heart and perseverance from my mother as well. But, I never wanted to be a doctor like her. In my childhood, I just played like a teacher so as to give lecture to others. I never played as a doctor. So, it's obvious that I didn't want to be a doctor.

It was the time of socialist when I passed the 10th standard exam. I took English as my major subject at university. I graduated in 1979. My father had already been detained twice then. I just wanted to be a journalist like him as I had seen his activities in the students' revolution and U Thant revolution. But, he said that I was not ready yet as a fresh graduate. He told me that he would teach me journalism, but not allow me to work as a journalist at that time.

He closely taught me everything about journalism, including how to write news. I became a journalist in this way. I was just a very stupid girl in my youth days.



The Foundation of Life as a Journalist

Between 1979 and 1989, my father didn't let me work as a journalist. He just gave me the training. But at that time, he had been working at Associated Press (AP) American news agency. So, I wrote news for him while he was travelling. Actually, AP knew that I was working from behind. I wrote some news. I was 36 years old in 1989. I'd studied journalism for about 10 years then. So, he might think that I became an adult. In this way, I started to work as a journalist in 1989. There was no training at that time. I just had to learn closely from my father. A journalist must have speed, fairness and accuracy. I noticed that he gave top priority to accuracy. Fairness comes after that and speed is last. It won't be okay if we write in a rush one or two minutes earlier and make mistakes. Our integrity is much more important. So, prioritize accuracy first. My policy is that it's important to be accurate rather than to be late for a few minutes.

Difficulties of Woman Journalist

There were very few woman journalists at that time. I was the only one then. So, I was prominent among other male journalists. There comes the difficulty for me. I was easily noticeable and so, I could be captured easily. My presence on the scene was recognizable. Once, while we were in a lane waiting for the news of the protest at Rangoon Institute of Technology, they noticed me and shouted through the loud speaker like this- "Daw Aye Aye Win, get out of the way!" How embarrassing! I was driven away by name. I think that being noticeable as a woman journalist has been a difficulty for me.

And another thing is that parents tend to worry about their daughters. Being a fearless person, I didn't know it. Sometimes, I had to go out at 2:00 am. I got back home in the morning. Parents worry about their daughters more than their sons. Honestly speaking, I almost forgot that I am a woman. Being a woman didn't impose any difficulty on my job.

Power of a Journalist

It takes passion to do this job. Passion is a kind of power anyway. It's a demanding job for those without passion and they are likely to give up easily. On the other hand, challenges turn into strength for the passionate ones. That will be the difference, I think. As for me, I have never been tempted to give up because of challenges. I have been crazy about this job.

I have proven that the more distress I face, the more determined I become. I have also been happy at work

I always say that I have been lucky enough to follow my heart. I don't want to leave my job. As for some people, they work at companies due to high salaries. But, they don't enjoy their job. As a journalist, I didn't earn much. But, I was satisfied with my job. I wish I could have done more! I am pleased with myself as I think that all my efforts have paid off.

Fourth Pillar of the Country

The fourth pillar is one of the four mainstays. It won't be stable only with the three bases: legislation, judiciary and executive. Media, the fourth pillar, is for check and balance. When these four pillars are in harmony, it's much help to the development of the country. The 'fourth pillar' is not a word that we have invented. It has its own origin. Everyone, especially the democratic government, must accept that these four pillars need to be balanced in a democratic nation.

But under any government, the media is likely to be hated by either side or both. Anyway, we must carry on. Surrounded by dislikes, we are just happy with our work. Actually, no one will love us. Neither the government nor the army will like journalists. We have been standing up for the stability of this fourth pillar. I always believe that there must be the fourth pillar. And the government should treat it with respect. Only then, we'll be able to support and balance each other.

Retirement from the Profession of Journalism

Actually, I have considered maintaining some documents of my father and donating them to a library or something like that in my retirement. I want to maintain his written works, especially the discussion and records of the journalists' association in his time. I have been reading those documents. But, I haven't implemented the thought yet. I spend my time on travelling, reading, answering questions and interviews. Mostly, I happen to read more.

Unlike before, I have time for social affairs. I was nearly friendless for over 25 years as a journalist. News used to be my only friend, my meal and my home. So, I lost touch with my friends from university. I didn't go to any of their social events like wedding receptions. I just devoted myself in work. Those who are not interested in news will not understand this. I myself have not seen it as a fault before retirement.

Some people do not like journalists. We are preoccupied with news all the time. I have come to realize that only after my retirement.

What a Good Journalist is

It's better if a journalist has passion. Even if you have to do this job for your livelihood, you must work in accordance with the ethics. Journalists, lawyers, doctors, or whatever, every profession has its own ethics. If you work ethically, you will feel pleased later for what you have done. If you are a journalist, you must try to be a good one. Most importantly, journalists must read all the time.

When I was a journalist, I tried to reflect on myself as soon as I woke up in the morning. If I was behind other journalists in writing or getting the news, I used to blame myself. Since before the time of internet, I'd tried my best to keep up with others.

You must practice all the time. You must also learn constantly. I want to say that a good journalist has ethics, efforts and learning.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

NAW MAY OO

Little White Dove of Peace

Naw May Oo is a Kayin ethnic woman who has been in the mainstream of Myanmar's peace process for more than 20 years. She believes that she is responsible for peace as well as for the country's affairs. It can also be said that she has been on this journey for long because of her heartfelt emotions. Moreover, she has been fighting for the rights and leadership of women on an equal basis with men. Her childhood dream has been for all ethnic groups in Myanmar to live through thick and thin. During the interview, it is highly visible that her peace dream and her family life are in direct proportion.



*As a mother myself,
I don't want to ignore
my own child.
We love our country.
And we want to serve
for the country.*

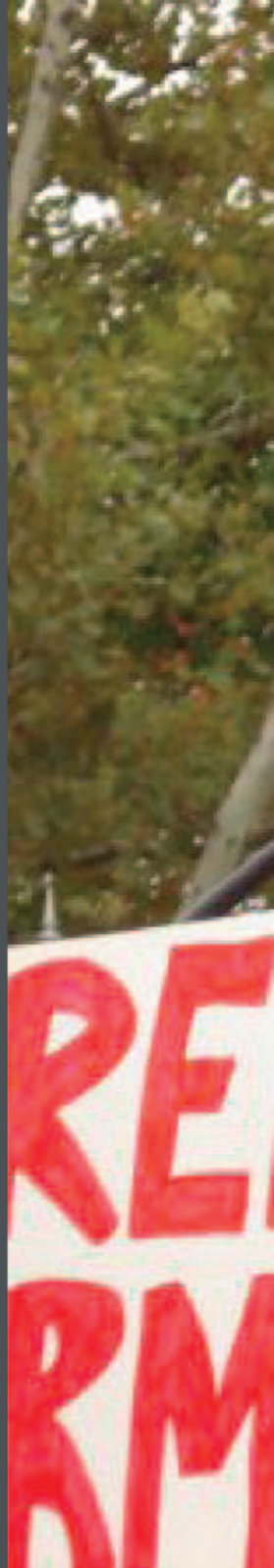




Photo: Naw May Oo facebook

Unity is Strength

I have been on this path for more than 20 years. So, I think that I quite understand Myanmar's politics. Some situations are predictable and some are not. Anyway, most people understand that it's a long and difficult path on one's own. But, I do believe that we will be able to go faster if we all work together towards the peace goal of our country.

Wish to be a Civil Engineer

I hadn't finished the high school level when we went underground in this border. So, I had to arrange to continue my study. There, I got the chance to learn Kayin literature at school for the first time in life. After two years of high school level, I tried to continue my study in the U.S.A. I studied Law at university. I chose to pursue it for the benefit of the country and the public. At times, I feel regretful about that. Through the years, I reflected what I really wanted. Actually, I wanted to be a civil engineer if I had the option and opportunity. I wanted to construct bridges and roads. But now, I have to get the best out of the present circumstances, rather than my wishes.



In the past, there was no perception of gender equality in the mind of political advocates. No one thought deeply about it or noticed it. In my view, it's not just about women. It's a social issue related to both men and women. If we couldn't see each other with equality, there would be problems in any political dialogue.

A Mother's Sacrifice

So many women have participated and are participating in the peace and political process. There are lots of women who face worse situations than mine. They are in difficult situations as they have no helper or baby sitter or something like that. Worst of all, some are challenged to choose whether to pursue politics or take care of their children. As a mother myself, I don't want to ignore my own child. We love our country. And we want to serve for the country. On the other hand, we cannot turn a blind eye to our own children. So, there are times when we have to make choices and give up unwillingly.

Direct Proportion

We cannot accept inequality and discriminations between ethnic groups. We wouldn't need to fight if inequality could be turned into equality and discriminations could be eliminated. There would be peace with no war. What it's got to do with me is that only in times of peace, my son would be able to live together with both parents. Or else, we would be separated.

As a citizen who was born here, I hope the best for Myanmar. Unfortunately, we have been familiar with the civil war for many years. We have also seen its consequences with our very own eyes. Anyway, we just hope the best for our country. Again, as a woman, I hope for many changes from the women's perspective

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

YING LAO

with High Moral Value for Living Together in Peace

Ying Lao is the deputy director of the Salween Institute for Public Policy. She is also an advisory board member of Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN). She has a high moral value for living together in peace. She has got the chance to observe such process since the age of 16. We have interviewed her about the current peace process as well as some of her life events.



Initially, there were many women participants. But, the number dropped later. It's even worse when it comes to the quality or decision making power.



Photo: Hlaing Myo Tun

Get Going, yet Get Nowhere

I'll talk about the peace process first. There are at least three paths to the current peace process of our country. The first path is the Nationwide Cease fire Agreement (NCA) led by the government. The second one is Union Peace Conference. And the other one is Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC). In my opinion, peace building is more extensive than that. It also covers informal commitments like community peace building.

In my personal view, the formal peace process by the government and other stakeholders is in a stalemate. It's full of stumbling blocks. It's like running around in a circle. Everyone is running with the resources. But feeling exhausted, they ultimately end up in that very circle. I think that they are getting nowhere up to now.

Currently, the only way towards peace is building a true federal state. As the first step to do so, all the stakeholders need to have a deep



understanding of what a true federal state is. At present, each and everyone has their own perspectives. They all agree on building the true federal state. But, they don't have a common understanding. Instead of discussing the main theme, they just argue over their own definitions of the term. That's the main reason for getting nowhere.

In Need of More Statesmen

First of all, we need to reflect why we want the federal system in our country. One of my teachers used to say, "Go back to the origin". The origin of independence by our former national leaders is the principle of living together in peace.

We all have different languages, cultures and racial status. So, when it comes to the unity of such diverse groups, we need to find a way how to live together in peace. We have found out that the federal system will shape the society where everyone can live together in peace. That's why we want a true federal state. We also need to consider whether such option contributes to the principle of living together in peace. If it does, it's a suitable system for us.

I always say that there tends to be mostly politicians in our country. There are just very few statesmen who really want to serve for the country. I don't mean that politicians are not good. They are good in their own ways. But, we need more statesmen in our country.

Politicians will have only political thoughts. Politicians and military personnel just consider how to strategize so that they can get a step ahead of others. But, their fellows in the discussion (enemies in the past) are not idiots. They will think how to get further as well. If that's the case, will we be able to live together in peace? We won't be able to solve the problem in that way.

On the other hand, statesmen consider only the benefit of their country. If necessary, they are ready to sacrifice their own good. Such a brave heart belongs to them.

Women's Participation and Peace

As I said earlier, there are formal and informal commitments to the peace process. We have found out that women's participation is low in the NCA path by the government. The figures tend to fluctuate over the period. Initially, there were many women participants. But, the number dropped later. It's even worse when it comes to the quality or decision making power.

If we look at the number of women participants at the 21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conference, we will see a relatively high percentage. But, very few of them are in the front position of the discussion.

How She became a part of the Peace Process

I have specialized in this subject as I am very passionate about it. The completion of my study coincided with the great momentum of the peace process in the country. So, I came back here to apply my knowledge. In fact, the principle of living together in peace is like a guiding star to me. Whatever I do in my daily life, I ask myself if it is of any assistance to that principle. I want to support the cause. That's why I have studied Federalism and Public Policy. The mainstream setting is not the driving force for me to pursue this path. It's just a setting where I will be able to apply what I have learned.

Family Life

I have been in this field since the age of 16, not fully 17 yet. As far as I remember, the whole family had to leave for Thailand on 21st May 2001, which is Shan Revolution Day. There were many invasive attacks in our local area at that time. The villages were devastated. The local people were in social and economic crisis. So, they went to neighboring Thailand for greener pastures. We are one of such families.

I was a lucky girl. Two of my aunts belonged to Shan Women's Action Network. They and other members just wanted me to pursue education as I was a young girl of 16 or 17. I attended a variety of capacity-building trainings by SWAN. Thanks to them, I am here in this position today.

Her Dream

As I said earlier, my dream has always been to be able to live together in peace. I hope that we will be able to build the nation with that principle one day. That's my dream. I am doing to the best of my ability. I am not fully satisfied yet. I still want to do more. Last, but not least, I hope for more statesmen than politicians in our country.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung



MAI LEN NEI CER

**Chin Woman Leader of Ninu
(Women in Action Group)**

“**W**hen we look at discriminations against women, we mostly see the influence of customs. Especially, whenever making a change, there tends to be only men in the position of decision making. The influence of social customs is too great.”



*Actually,
customs are not
written laws.
They just depend on
the people who adopt them.*



Photo: Hlaing Myo Tun

How she was brought up in the family

I am the youngest of nine siblings in the family. I am not married yet as I prefer to do what I want freely.

When I was young, I just wanted to go to school. I was good at Mathematics. I couldn't continue my study after the 10th standard as my father couldn't afford it. Well, things keep changing all the time. I wanted to be educated. And I loved writing. I wanted to pursue those dreams. But, when they didn't come true, my aspirations kept changing one after another. I came into the field of women later. I am an advocate of women's affair. We were born in a small village. When we were young, our father was quite alright. He sent all of us to school in that village- not only sons but also daughters. Some villagers wondered why he sent us to school. In their view, daughters would leave home when they get married. All the investments into them would be at a loss. So, daughters shouldn't be sent to school. As for my father, he seemed to accept education for all. But, as a person raised in this community, he was influenced by the tradition to some extent, but not too much. He gave the rights to daughters as well. We were brought up that way.



Customary Barrier like a Shield

There are lots of main problems faced by Chin women. For example: problems related to education, business and health. But, I have gone for legal affair as I first acquired my interest in that.

Well, it'll be difficult to say. Actually, customs are not written laws. They just depend on the people who adopt them. And they are not the same, depending on locations and ethnic groups.

But, we have found out that most women are still excluded in the decision making of their engagement and marriage. When it comes to divorce, they don't get the custody of their children. They have to leave home without taking any property with them. They don't have the right to inherit either. If there is no daughter in the family, a man of relation is given property. Such customs are still in practice until now. Especially, there are very few changes regarding widows. There are some cases in which daughters have become heirs in the sonless family. But, we have found out that there are no changes concerning widows. We have observed those three elements.

Inequality

When we look at discriminations against women, we mostly see the influence of customs. Especially, whenever making a change, there tends to be only men in the position of decision making. The influence of social customs is too great.

For instance, even if some Chin women want to change, they are afraid that Chin ethnic minority would be engulfed by the majority in the country. They are afraid that they would lose the identity of Chin if they didn't adopt those customary practices. They continue to adopt them so as to maintain their identity as Chin. Those perceptions have been deeply rooted in them.

It can also be said that these situations are somewhat related to the slow development of the state. We have found out that people become broad-minded when there is development in their location. For example: education can soften their attitudes to some extent. But, I don't mean every educated person. There are some educated people who are very difficult to change.

There are some women who want to change. Especially, the victims do want to change. On the other hand, some women are used to these customs. They think that they should practice them.

Starting Point of Ninu Women's Organization

I have entered this field since 2013. The big challenge for me is that even though most people want to change, only a few of them are willing to take actions.

Before 2013, I'd worked for an organization. Once, that organization sent me to a gathering of university students. The Chief Minister of Chin State U Salai Lyan Lwel attended the event as well. He was the district law officer then. There, he talked about discriminations against women, including the lack of rights to inherit. He also pointed out that the outdated law should be changed. It dawned on me that I must do something as a woman. I came back to Yangon and gathered some women I know. I happened to set up the organization in this way.

We have used the named "Ninu" meaning that women have their own capacity. I want women to get the rights on an equal basis with men. I also want them to become the ones who can take responsibilities for their regional development. I want a peaceful community with full access to human rights and gender equality. I have decided to keep my contributions to these affairs.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

CHRISTINA KYI

The Transformation of Myanmar Film Industry and Woman Director

Filmmaking is one of the male-dominated industries all over the world. Especially, in the countries like Myanmar where there are so many customary practices, it is full of challenges for women to play a leading role in filming. No matter what, a woman named Christina Kyi has set her foot in this challenging field. She has taken responsibilities as a director or king of shooting. She has also brought about the transformational move to the whole film industry in Myanmar. How has she tried hard to be in this position? What are the driving forces behind her? What challenges has she faced as a woman? Let's unveil some of her life events.



*Another thing is that
I am just a small woman.
Actually, filmmakers need to be
strong. So, no one wanted to
team up with me.*





Photo: Thura

‘Christina Kyi in Her Childhood’

I have acquired a great interest in art since my childhood. But, I never thought that I would make a living out of it. I just learned Kabyalut or traditional basic dance for two months. I didn't learn anything else. Like other Myanmar parents, my parents wanted me to put all my heart and soul in study. They just wanted me to be a doctor or an engineer. They seemed to be afraid that I would pursue the path of art. So, they didn't let me continue with my dance lessons. Only when I became independent later, I had the chance to learn dancing to my heart's content with the guidance of mentor U Win Maung.

Discriminations in Her Days at Film School

I attended a film school in the U.S.A. There, timetables, including the rooms where we would have to study, were out on the first day. I checked my timetable and went to my classroom. Most students in that room were men. I got to know there and then that very few women are interested in filmmaking. When I looked into the room, I just saw one or two female



students. The male students said to me, “You are in the wrong room.” I replied, “No, I am not. I have carefully looked at my timetable.” Again, they told me that it was not the Fashion department. I came to realize that they still think inside the box even in a big country like there. Honestly speaking, I ended up crying on that first day. My spouse had to encourage me. We were not married then.

Another thing is that I am just a small woman. Actually, filmmakers need to be strong. So, no one wanted to team up with me. They thought that I wouldn’t be able to carry the filming equipment like lights. As students, we were our own boss as well as our own employee. We had no other helper. I wondered whether I would give up or I would try my best to be able to lead them. I found out that a small male student didn’t have to show off his abilities like me. On the other hand, I, as a woman, had to try hard so that I could be accepted and included in the team. Since then, I have noticed the role of equal rights. We women have to try harder as we lack equal rights.

More Efforts to be a Woman Director

I am a newcomer. I am a woman as well. So, I have to show that I have been pursuing the right path in order to gain the trust of others. Sometimes, I have to explain by word of mouth. But, there are also times when I cannot do so. Anyway, I belong to the type of people who can keep their desire. I just want to accomplish my tasks. Other people will get to know my level afterwards. I am afraid that I will not be able to complete my tasks. So, I never explode my emotions that will make my work undone. I do as much as I can to finish the project assigned to me.

When I came back here to Myanmar, I was not able to accept every assignment. I managed to show my work at the cinemas only after four years of its final editing. I felt unhappy each and every day during that waiting period. Art became the career for me. But unfortunately, I could not take on every task given to me. And as for the works I created, I didn’t have the chance to show them. Consequently, I was not quite known as an artist. I could not share them with the audience for their feedback. So, I was in despair those days.

Another thing is our basic needs. We faced financial problems on a daily basis. We also had to look after our child. In times of such hardships, I try to see those who are in worse situations. We tend to think that our life is the worst of all. Actually, there are too many people who are wrestling with troubles. So, I try to see the worse lives of others. I live with the

guidance of religious teachings. I also have my beloved family around me. Thanks to them, I have never collapsed spiritually.

Behind Success

Since my childhood, I have kept my aspirations to myself and made commitments to achieving them. Whether they are good or bad, I just pursue them with the unyielding spirit. That attitude is somewhat a helping hand to me. And another thing is that I have to tolerate more than necessary in this country. I went through a tough time here. I even decided that I would not go see my parents until my efforts paid off. I had to struggle like that.

I have also encountered a variety of external blows. Some people give us feedback out of their love for art, or out of their wish for our betterment. On the other hand, there are some people who want to hurt us with their harsh criticism. I try my best to keep the latter out of my mind. I believe in the cause and effect law of Karma.

We, directors, are responsible for the whole film. We also need to feel in the position of the audience. After all, we just want to enjoy a good film which is worth our precious time. I want my works to be like that. So, I create them with that fellow feeling in the heart.

Her Family Life

We just work most of the time. We cannot engage in many leisure activities. Actually, we don't very much enjoy going out with friends. We just love to be home. We try to be home as soon as we finish our work. I do love my husband. I want him to be happy. He just enjoys a quiet and peaceful life. So, I fulfill his wish by living up to the life style of his choice.

Goodwill in Whatever

We need passion in art or whatever we do. Some people are not quite clear about the difference between passion and interest. And another thing is goodwill. Goodwill has its own reflection. If you integrate it into your passion, you will be successful.

DR. THET SU HTWE

Sexuality Education Provider

Dr. Thet Su Htwe has been conducting eye-opening trainings on sexual health with the name of ‘Strong Flower Sexuality Education Services’. She has been doing this since 2016, not only in the urban but also in the rural. When it comes to sex education, it is still a little unfamiliar in Myanmar society. So, it has not been easy for her to provide such trainings. We have got a chance to interview Dr. Thet Su Htwe who has faced many different challenges.



*A woman trainer
made me a little inconvenient
She didn't attend my class.
But ...*



**STR
FLOW
SEXU
Education**



Photo: Hlaing Myo Tun

Sexuality Education and Myanmar Society

I started Strong Flower Sexuality Education Services in early 2016. Before that, I'd carried out such educational activities starting from 2014. At first, I had a chance to learn about sexuality and felt the paradigm shift myself. Then, I decided to take this initiative so that I could share my knowledge with others. Actually, it's not been too easy or too difficult for me.

Sex is an unfamiliar word in our Myanmar society. As for reproductive health, it is not that strange to them. They tend to be hesitant when it comes to sexuality. Their eyes get brighter with concerns. It can be said that sex is still a sensitive word.

I have been providing sexuality education both in the urban and in the rural. I happen to do more in villages beyond Yangon. Actually, there



is no limit in terms of location. I educate all over the country wherever I have a chance. According to my personal experience, I've found out that it still lacks such knowledge in the areas where there is not much development or where there is difficult transportation or where there is limited access to the internet, television and educational trainings.

Weakness in Sexual Discussions

Mainly, there is no place for women where they can learn and share about sexuality. Throughout the country, it's still weak in open discussions about sexuality at schools and universities. It's also weak in creating a safe and positive learning environment for the public. For these reasons, they cannot access the right information about sexuality at the appropriate age. They just learn it through word of mouth. And mostly, they just get misconceptions from others. With such wrong information in mind, they even end up in sexual violence. I've personally found out such cases.

Driving Force on the Way Forward

Actually, there is lots of driving force for me. Regarding this sexuality education, I have to explain more than others do. I have to talk about why it is important. And another thing is that it takes a little longer to get permission for my trainings.

Once, I had a talk at a training school. I got their permission to do so. There, a woman trainer made me a little inconvenient. She didn't attend my class. But through the students, she heard that I had taught about sexual organs. Actually, I have never used dirty images for my teaching aids. I just use the images of educational purpose. I always take into consideration the background and culture of my training venues. In some places, I mostly explain in word. I just use a pencil or a pen for some drawings. As far as I remember, I just applied this method at that training school. I didn't show any images. I just used some sketching of my own. But, I was harshly criticized that I had taught shameful things about men. It's one of the unforgettable memories for me.

I am also an Islamic woman who wears the hijab. Judging by my appearance, people tend to think that I will talk about religion. I have come to realize that later. After two days or four days of training, I usually hear feedback from the trainees. They said that they were anxious at first. But, they found out that I hadn't used any discriminatory words against religion or nationality throughout the training. I didn't use other sensitive words

either. They could also learn about the usage related to sexuality. I hear such feedback in most trainings. I feel that they are the driving force for me to work more in this field. I really feel a sense of joy.

When Giving Sexuality Training to Men

I once gave the training at a village in Yangon Region. There, the trainees for my first section were all men. I was very nervous at that time. Many questions came into my mind. To what extent would they understand my talk? What if they laugh at me during my talk? How would I react if they did so? I couldn't sleep all night long. I was dizzy on the morning of the training. I had much energy drink and went to the training anyway. I finally decided that I must educate them no matter what. In actual fact, it didn't turn out the way I had expected. I found out that those men became more interested in my talk and asked me what they wanted to know. They also shared what they had known about sexuality. I could help them correct the wrong information in their mind. As my first training experience with them turns out to be okay, I am not that shy to educate men later.

Encouragement of Her Husband

My husband is quite supportive to me. As for my mother, she has been quite all right later. She used to worry much when I started doing this. Parents worry like that as we are sometimes among the public attention and conflicts. My mother just wanted me to open a clinic like other doctors. She wasn't happy about my choice in the past. But now, she doesn't talk much about that. Maybe, she is getting used to it or something like that. As for my husband, he always encourages me to look at the common good rather than myself alone. Regarding health care services, I offer home visits for the elderly. I haven't opened my own clinic yet.

Wish for a Big Change

I am very pleased when I see some trainees who are enlightened with a change or who start to make a change. But, I am not fully contented with the national level. With the support from the government, community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations, I wish for a big change in terms of the mindset. We still need to try a lot for that.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

DAW THEIN THEIN AYE

FIFA-Recognized Referee

Daw Thein Thein Aye is the very first FIFA-recognized woman referee in Myanmar football history. She attended a sports training for the youth in 2007 and got the opportunities to become a referee. She has taken up sports since the 5th or 6th standard. She has become a referee at the age of over 20. Despite her great interest in Athletics in her young days, she has to give it up due to a family circumstance. Her experiences also show that she has faced a lot of challenges as a referee.



*it's important not to
avoid their eyes.*

*If you do, their first impression on
you will be gone.*



Photo: Ye Nyi Hein

Foundation of a Referee's Life

I have taken up sports since the 5th or 6th standard. But, I just loved to run. I had no contact in that field. So, I just started from the sports competitions for students. While others were well-nourished, I was not so. A good athlete must be well-nourished. He/she must have enough sleep and enough resting time. I couldn't eat or sleep enough then. I also had to go to school. For these reasons, I didn't meet the criteria for selection. I stopped Athletics and entered the field of referees. I didn't leave the field of sports.

Her Efforts for the position as a Referee

There were times when we had nothing to eat. My father was a night watchman at a basic school and my mother sold Bain Mont (Myanmar Pancakes). My parents said that I would be ashamed of their jobs. But, I didn't feel so. I praise myself for that. I made Bane Mont before going to the training in the morning. I helped my mother with her work. I also studied my school lessons. . What's more, I had to do the cleaning up at school. I never felt depressed about that. I didn't feel inferior at all because of my parents' jobs.



I am grateful to my parents as they have supported me as much as they can. Even though they didn't have the financial power like others, they lifted me up to the best of their ability. My mother never let us down even in times of no food. I admire her through-thick-and-thin attitude. She was worried that I might become weak in my school lessons as I was on the path to pursue sports. As we were poor, she wanted me to be educated. Likewise, she wanted me to be an outstanding athlete because I had a great interest in that field. I wanted to fulfill her wishes. So, I tried my best both in study and sports. I just feel sad as I have not been a talented athlete.

Unforgettable Memories for a Referee

As my very first assignment, I was in charge of a men football match. I had some difficulties with male footballers. They looked down on me as they had never seen a woman referee. So, they found fault with me. They didn't have much respect for a woman referee. But, they didn't dare to say it out loud as they were afraid of their coach. Despite those challenges, I have tried my best in matches. People used to look down on me and say unpleasant things.

Once, I got seriously injured. Everyone, including FIFA, thought that I might retire from the profession. At that time, I encouraged myself that my injured leg could get better. I followed the doctor's instructions precisely and did the exercise systematically. I managed to overcome that difficulty.

Another incident happened in Mandalay. It was the match between Mandalay and Mon for the state-level shield. I was assigned to be in charge there. Honestly speaking, the players were more experienced than me at that time. They were well-known selection players. I was just a national referee then, not a selection one. Compared with them, I didn't have much power. But, I had self-confidence. When I decided to give penalty, a player used the bad language. This problem would not have happened if I had observed their behavior. I showed the red card to that player and dismissed him. My teachers used to say, "Don't resolve a case at once". But, I did three things simultaneously then. I gave the penalty and goal. I also removed him with the red card. So, the problem occurred and the match had to stop. Next day, they had to play again behind closed doors. I always remember that match. I share my personal experience with the juniors so that they don't have to face like that. I am here in this position only after I have overcome so many challenges.

Internationally-recognized Award Winner

So far, I have served for about 80 football matches, including international ones. I got the Best Referee Award by ASEAN and the Honorable Award by our Football Federation. I also got the FIFA Award given to referees at U20 World Cup.

Wish for More Women Referees

There are only very few female referees. At the moment, we have only two FIFA female referees and three assistant referees. One more position is still available at FIFA. We are trying to reach out our helping hand to the juniors. We will be here just for a period of time as long as our fitness permits. The time will come later when we have to pass this position on to others.

There is no age limit now. If you meet their fitness and training criteria, you will be accepted. It doesn't matter even if you are over 75. In the past, one had to retire after the age of 45. It's no longer like that now. You just need to pass their tests.

Words of Inspiration from a FIFA-recognized referee

The difference between men and women is that men have excellent football skills. So, we, women, need to be stronger. When you are in charge of a male football match, the players will look at their woman referee as soon as they enter the field. At such times, it's important not to avoid their eyes. If you do, their first impression on you will be gone. When they look at you, just look back into their eyes and smile at them. Sometimes, you will need the pride of professionalism. In terms of performance, you need to show that your rules are consistent whether it's a male or female football match. Only then, male players will accept your performance. Typically, they don't think highly of women referees. But, you yourself have to work to impress them. In addition to performance, you must personally be smart since you come into the field. And if your team can support you well, it will be an easygoing match. I want to share this message.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

VORONICA

Kayan Lady Boxer

Her name is Voronica. She was born in Kaphu Eastern village of Phe Kone town in Southern Shan State. Her family members call her Balro as the nick name. She is one of very few Myanmar traditional female boxers. She has entered the field of Myanmar traditional boxing since June 2017. In the past, she used to take up boxing, Bando martial art and other sports as well. Her mother isn't happy about her choice whenever she sees her daughter being punched by the other. But as for her father, he feels pleased as her choice is the blessing of God. Balro was only 15 when she started to pursue boxing. Now, her aspiration is to promote Myanmar traditional boxing, not only in the country but also in the rest of the world. We got to know about her in detail during the interview.



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Photo: Thura

Foundation of Life as a Boxer

I am the fifth one among six siblings. I went to school at a convent in Phe Kone. There, the town sports officer asked me if I wanted to take up boxing. I have acquired a great love for action movies since my childhood. I enjoy punching and fighting very much. So, I wanted to pursue that.

When I discussed the matter with mother, she didn't let me go. But as I was very passionate about that, I decided to go without their permission. I was trained at Nay Pyi Daw boxing club for six months. After that, I moved to Yangon. I faced many difficulties at that time. My family wasn't doing well financially then. I didn't get along with them either. When I left home, I had no money with me. One of my aunts gave me the pocket money of 3000 Kyats. Fortunately, I found another 5000 Kyats by chance. It meant a lot to me then. I also faced many other difficulties as I was not very good at Myanmar language.

I couldn't contact my family as there were no phones before. I was out of touch with them for long. They worried a lot. They even wondered whether I became a victim of human trafficking. I had to cry a lot in times of homesickness. I also had a tough time when I got painful during the training. But, I wanted to support my family. And I myself came into this field passionately.

Memorable Match

I had my very first match experience in Singapore. There, I got a chance to serve for the country and won the bronze medal. I felt very sorry as I couldn't bring the gold medal. I just wanted to keep punching even when the referee stopped the match. I was just a green horn then. But, I later came to realize the rules.



Actually, there is no match that can make me very nervous. I am well prepared and so is the other. And we both have two hands respectively. I just face the opponent with the attitude that I must win. I also feel motivated because of the audience. I have the aspiration to win the gold medal at SEA games. I will promote our traditional boxing up to the international level. I will also let the world see my boxing skills.

Lady in the Traditional Boxing Field

My strength is that I am better at hand movements as I have experience in boxing. But, I am weak in leg movements. I can't use my leg movements well in matches.

There are some fellow women in the boxing field. But, very few join the traditional field. The traditional boxing is not like other ones. It's a kind of fierce and painful sport. So, most women are not likely to pursue it. But, women also have the right to do what men do. We just need opportunity and passion. As for me, I can do most of what men do. I am satisfied with myself as I am now here in this position due to my efforts. I am happy that I have got the golden opportunity to follow my heart. When I retire from this field, I want to set up my own club and share my skills with others.

Not Only Boxing But Also Singing

I have been interested in singing since I was young. I took part in Myanmar Idol singing contest. I was not well prepared then. I just participated with my passion only. Luckily, I was one of the top 20 selections. I wanted to be the winner.

I have also dreamed of being a well-known singer. I am moved to tears when I see other vocalists singing to the audience. I am deeply touched in the heart when I hear their great songs. I want to perform like that in front of the audience.

I enjoy both traditional boxing and singing. But at the moment, I can focus only on the traditional boxing. I feel satisfied with myself in this field. I want the belt in boxing. I also want to be a national champion. I will retire after I can bring such pride to the country.

I am not very contented with singing yet. I still need lots of practice in it. I will pursue it after my retirement from the sports field.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MI SAR TAR

Supervisor of Mon National Education Center, the New Mon State Party

Mi Sar Tar is the supervisor of Mon National Education Center, the New Mon State Party. She was born in Kayote Pati village in Than Phyu Zayart township. After high school level, she joined Maw La Myaing University and graduated in Zoology. She then came back to her native village and worked as a teacher at the village school for four years. After that, she joined the New Mon State Party with the desire to support ethnic education, literature and culture. During the interview, we got to know about her life in detail.



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AUSTRALIAN CENT CHINA IN THE W



Photo: Mi Sar Tar facebook

How She Joined the New Mon State Party

I was not very passionate about my teaching job at the state school as it lacked support for ethnic education. At that time, the New Mon State Party was about to upgrade their middle school into high school. So, they were in need of human resources. We went there to fill the gap for the position of teachers.

I joined Mon Ethnic Literature and Culture Association at University. There, I felt the lack of rights to ethnic affairs. So, I advocated for that. When I was a teacher at the village high school, I found out that they didn't support even to celebrate Mon National Day. They didn't encourage Mon cultural performances even on Mon National Day. I couldn't make any difference about ethnic affair in that position. So, I joined the New Mon State Party with the perception that I would be able to follow my



heart there. I was 28 years old then. As we had to go underground, I asked for my mother's permission. She didn't object, but she felt so sad. In this way, I left home with other friends.

New Location with New Challenges

Well, we had to face so many challenges. After the military training, we were assigned to the education department. We didn't see harsh conditions as challenges at that time because we were very passionate about our assignment. We had to cut down the bamboos, look for food in the forest or something like that.

I also found out that as a woman, I lacked access to leadership. Although there were many women members in the party, we could see men only when it comes to the leadership role. It's also a challenge for us.

The New Mon State Party assigned me to be in charge of the education center. I tried hard to bring about more improvements. I advocated in the community. I met and discussed with Mon scholars. I didn't blow my own trumpet. I just did my best.

Her Desire to Brighten the Corner of Education for Mon Nationalities

The education department of the New Mon State Party is called Mon National Education Center. There are 133 Mon national schools with more than 800 teachers and staff. Mon education system applies the method of mother-tongue-based multi-subjects. The ethnic education department is not the same as the government education department. The teachers from ethnic schools have difficulty in terms of salary.

Now, our education center is carrying out government-recognized advocacy in the community. Especially, we do it with the aim of education for children in the remote areas. We don't want them to be drop-outs. In the past, there were not many schools in Mon state. There were many illiterate people among battles. So, it's very difficult to advocate such illiterate parents. They didn't understand about education. We teach three languages in our schools: Mon, Myanmar and English. In the past, we used to teach illiterate parents how to read, write and calculate. We tried to establish Mon schools in the locations where there were no government schools. Consequently, there are now many Mon national schools, not only in the areas without government schools, but also even in the areas with government schools.

We advocate parents to send their children to school until they finish their basic education and get access to higher education if possible. We carry out such advocacy activities in the community. I want to serve for my nationalities because we have been far from development.

Actually, the whole country has been left behind with slow progress. In my opinion, education is the most important. So, I want to brighten the corner of education for Mon nationalities. So far, I have served for the education sector of the New Mon State Party for 26 years amidst challenges. And we have been working with the hope of mother-tongue education policy for all ethnics in Myanmar.

Equality and Autonomy

Our country has been slow in the pace of development because of the civil war for more than 70 years. Although the country has regained independence, we are not really independent. The administration system used to be a bad one for all the ethnics. So, I believe that we need to fight until our country becomes a federal state. That's the hope of the whole country. As for me, I hope for the true federal state with equality and autonomy. Now, the peace discussion is in a stalemate. I don't want to say that I get depressed about that. But, I have to encourage myself to go on with hope.

Well, I am not fully satisfied yet. At least, I am pleased with my services for 26 years. We still need to improve many areas like leadership. I hope to keep up my efforts until the government recognize and support our Mon education system.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

CHIT HNIN PWINT & CHIT MOE PWINT

Twin Sisters from the Technology Field

Despite being graduates in Law, Chit Hnin Pwint and Chit Moe Pwint, the twin sisters, have been making their living in the technology profession. The inauguration of MICT Park during their university study has been the foundation of their great interest in technology as well as a dream for them. Now, they have set up a technology company called “Global New Wave Technology” and they have been providing services of mobile applications, websites and software development, not only to the local companies but also to the ones abroad. During the interview, it is obviously visible that the physically and spiritually alike twin sisters have been confidently pursuing this technology profession in which there are only a few women.



*As for the women who consider
pursuing the technology profession,
they must not be too girlish.
Too shy or too timid or
something like that.*





Photo: Ye Nyi Hein

With the Spirit of Leadership

When we were young, our father was a government staff in Geology. So, we used to live in the countryside. At that time, I didn't have the dream to be a co-founder in the technology field. When I was young, I thought that I was interested in leadership. It's something like the desire to lead others. When we talked to each other, I used to refer to myself with the pronoun as a big sister, no matter what mother taught me. Regardless of old or young, I used to talk like that. I wanted to lead others like that. I wanted to be a good leader.

Challenges for Women in the Technology Field

I think that the number of men is higher in most companies related to technology. It's their dominant field. So, there may be more or less gender discriminations. For example: as you know, we have to work 24 hours in the technology field. Sometimes, the server may be down at night or something like that. For some urgent work, we have to provide 24-hour service. So, employers tend to consider whether women can work night shift or overtime. It's not gender discrimination. But, it seems like a little discriminatory. And another important thing is passion. Only when we have passion, we will be able to pursue technology or whatever, regardless of our gender.



Milestones of Achievement

So far, Global New Wave Technology has carried out more than 200 projects with over 100 clients. The main reason for more projects and less clients is that in most cases, each client has hired us for two or three projects. And through those clients, we have got other networks as well.

In 2017, we got a golden opportunity. It's My Health Care application. It's an application for health. It makes connections between doctors and patients. It's mainly intended for women in terms of questions related to reproductive health. In Myanmar, women feel shy and timid to ask friends and parents about sexual health. They even feel hesitant to discuss it face to face with doctors. By using our application, they can ask questions about reproductive health and other health care services. With that application, we participated in a Women's Social Business Contest and became the winner. As the winner, we got the chance to study in Japan for two weeks and attend the International Women's Day event there.

When Women have to work in competition with Men

As for the women who consider pursuing the technology profession, they must not be too girlish. Too shy or too timid or something like that. We have to work shoulder to shoulder with men. We cannot deny working with them as we feel reluctant to talk to them. It's a team work of 4 or 5 people in each project. So, when assigning the tasks, it won't be okay at all if you, women, don't want to work with other men. It's important to tell what you think is right with a brave heart. Most importantly, you must have self-confidence. Only when you have confidence, you will be able to say bravely. Don't be afraid of making mistakes. Technology is never the same. It keeps changing all the time. You must learn it constantly. And first, you must try your best to be skillful in the technology area of your choice. You won't know everything in the beginning. Later, experience will be your teacher. At such time, you will be proficient in this field. You will become self-confident. By then, regardless of man or woman, you will come to know your own strength and weakness. You will be able to do to the best of your ability at the workplace. There won't be any difficulty for women. I want to share this message. .

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

SWEET

Female Tattoo Artist

Sweet is a female tattoo artist. She has learned that profession from her brother. Tattoo is a kind of art creation. At times, Sweet has to face difficulties and challenges. But, she is happy with her profession. Each tattoo has its own meaning, depending on the emotion of the client who gets it. Likewise, Sweet has been confidently pursuing her passion amidst harsh criticisms and disapprovals of others.



*Tattoo is just a decoration for
superficial beauty.*

It doesn't mean evil spirit.



Photo: Thant Zin Tun



Training for Tattoo Profession

I drew my first tattoo on the thigh of my brother Jerry. There's no need to be afraid of him as he is my brother as well as my mentor. As for practice, I used artificial skins and drew lines on them. I also looked up the designs online. Then, I practiced drawing those tattoo lines and showed them to my brother.

There are many types of tattoo designs like American mood and Japanese style. Each of them has their own history. There is no specific design for me. I just draw the best according to the customer's choice. Mostly, they tend to choose the tattoos related to their life, emotions and family.

Art of Tattoo

I was very nervous when I tattooed my first customer for money. For the customer, the tattoo would be permanent on him throughout his lifetime. For me, he was the very first stranger I had to tattoo. Anyway, I did it to the best of my ability.

Is a Tattooed Person necessarily a bad one?

When I post photos on my Facebook page, some people share and comment them using the bad language. I don't understand how they decide a person. As for me, a person has nothing to do with his/her appearance. I just look at the attitude. Tattoo is just a decoration for superficial beauty. It doesn't mean evil spirit. I want to say that a tattooed person isn't necessarily a bad one. Some people do not have tattoos on their body. But, we can't know whether they are good or bad. Actually, I don't like judging people by their appearance.

Even some women bully each other online. I want to let them know that just a word can kill one's life like a knife. When I once went out, I sensed that someone was watching me. So, I turned round and saw a mother and her daughter talking about me and looking at me with frowning faces. I was speechless and puzzled. I didn't even know whether to laugh or get angry with them. I'd never done anything to them before. I didn't even know who they were. I just let it go with the thought that they might not understand about tattoos. It's a memorable incident for me.

Joy of a Tattoo Artist

There are some customers who feel very happy to see my tattoos on them. I feel on top of the world. Such joy is irreplaceable. I feel satisfied with myself when I look back those tattoos. I am happy when my customers are happy.

In my view, tattoo is just a form of art. It depicts the memories of people related to their parents, families or perceptions. It shouldn't be viewed as before. I just want people to see it as the art of painting on the skin.

Message for Tattoo Amateurs

Many people have been interested in this tattoo profession recently. Their perceptions have changed during these four or five years. Some people want to learn from me through online. Most importantly, they need to be strong-minded. After all, nothing is impossible to a willing mind. Honestly speaking, I myself was not interested in this tattoo profession when I was young. I really wanted to be a tattoo artist later only after I had seen my brothers. My message is that everything is possible if you have strong determination. There is no need to feel inferior at all. You can overcome no matter what may come.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA SHWE YAMIN OO

Advocate for the Recyclables

Ma Shwe Yamin Oo is a founder of Recyglo Myanmar, which is a service provider for waste management and distributing the recyclables to recycling plants. She has brightened this corner as a contribution of the private sector so that the government alone do not have to handle the waste problem of Myanmar on a daily basis. We would like to feature the interview with Ma Shwe Yamin Oo, who wants to make Myanmar a clean place as well as a great country.



Another difficulty is that we women sometimes get restricted no matter how much we try. We do need a supportive environment.





Photo: Zin Ko Zaw

Starting Point of Recyglo Myanmar

Recyglo Myanmar was founded in May 2017, with the aim of contributing to private waste management services. Mostly, the government alone have to deal with that sector in our country. We want to carry out our recycle field, not only locally but also globally. So, we have chosen this name Recyglo, which consists of the words: 'Recycle' and 'Global'. Currently, we have been providing waste management services to businesses, companies and organizations.

Waste Pickup

When we first introduced our Recyglo to businesses, companies and organizations, they were not interested in our waste management services. It's because we charge a service fee as a private company. We have to cover logistics and labor costs. In our country, most businesses just want to give away their waste only. They don't want to cooperate with us because we ask for the service fee.

But later, we have found some organizations that do care for the environment. Instead of throwing away all the waste from their offices or businesses, they want the recyclables to be in the recycle process. So, they like our services. We started with one or two clients like that. Now, we have been providing our services to more than 400 organizations.

Let's Recycle the Waste!

As our first step, we could focus only on three kinds of recyclables: paper, plastic and tins. We distribute them to the recycling plants respectively. Later, we also deal with glass buyers for the glassware. When it comes to electronic waste like circuit boards or old wires, we make connection with the buyers of that kind. As for the kitchen waste, we can turn it into natural fertilizer and use that in organic farms. In that way, we can enjoy chemical-free fruits and vegetables.

Let's Dispose of the Waste Systematically!

It's just a bag of trash for us when we individually throw it away. But, all the waste materials get mixed at the dumpsite. There, the invisible chemical reactions happen. For example: many households throw away the rubbish like old batteries, plastic, paper and something like that. All those

waste materials combine at the dumpsite and end up in streams and rivers when it rains. At such time, the aquatic animals may eat them as their food. And the lead from old batteries will cause water pollution, which can harm the health of the animals in water. Again, the fish will be sold at the market. When we eat those fish, we will have to suffer from suffocation or cancers or something like that.

To resolve this, we need to throw away our waste systematically. Old paper can gain a new life when recycled. Likewise, plastic can be turned into other useful materials. If we just throw them away, they will negatively affect the growth of trees and plants on the ground. If they end up in water, they will also harm the aquatic animals. So, I would like to recommend systematic waste management.

To Make Myanmar Cleaner

Well, it's still a long way to go. While the government is doing their best, we individually need to try our best as well. At times, we shouldn't blame the government. They have a lot of things to focus on. They cannot pay much attention to their waste management sector. So, we brighten this corner as a contribution of the private sector. If each and every citizen gets involved in this process, we will be able to make Myanmar a better place. The motto of our Recyglo is 'Making Myanmar a Cleaner Place'. We hope for the cleaner country.



Follow the Heart

First of all, I have to defy my family. They just want me to wear smart uniform and work in the cosmetic or banking field. But, I just want to follow my heart. So, I have to confront with them. They don't understand what recycling is. They just see me buy discarded materials. I just said to them, "Please, just wait and watch. I will be successful when the time comes." I have given them the hope like that.

Another difficulty is that we women sometimes get restricted no matter how much we try. We do need a supportive environment. Besides this, we ourselves need to try our best. Or else, nothing will happen in our life.

Let's Refuse if not Necessary

I'd like to share the message of 5Rs.

The first R is 'Reduce'. Reduce your consumption (food, electricity, etc.) as much as you can. And reduce the use of plastic as well.

The second R is 'Reuse'. Instead of throwing away single use products, reuse them as much as possible and in as many forms as possible.

The third R is 'Recycle'. Even if you cannot reduce and reuse, help the recycle process. For example: You feel thirsty when you are out. You must buy a bottle of purified drinking water. Then, you should send that empty bottle to the recycling process. Or you can save the bottles at home and give them away to those who will really get involved in the recycling process.

The fourth R is 'Refuse'. It's like a custom here to ask for grocery bags all the time while shopping. People ask for a bag even when they buy a small thing. When they are back home, they just throw away those bags. That will make a mess. No one will benefit from it. So, refuse if possible. As for me, I put whatever I buy in my backpack. I ask for a bag only when my backpack is full. So, refuse if possible.

The last R is 'Respect'. We should respect our environment as much as we respect ourselves. Likewise, we should respect the generations to come. We shouldn't leave them among waste. We should leave clean environment and clean water for them.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

DAW KATHLEEN THEIN

from Tutor to Philanthropist

Daw Kathleen Thein is the founder of Ingyin May Philanthropic Hindu Women's Network. She is a Hindu woman who has contributed to the peace process and multi religious harmony. She has also been fighting for the equality of women, the main necessity of Hindu women. Daw Kathleen Thein, who once served as a tutor at university, is now a philanthropist who is brightening her corner in the peace process, multi religious harmony and women's affair.

How she became a tutor

My father, U Thein Maung, was the chairman of Federal Hindu Council, formerly known as National Hindu Federation. Everyone knew him. I have seven siblings. Except for me, the remaining six ones are outstanding.

I graduated in December 1983. Only seven students were qualified out of 350. At that time, the university was desperately in need of tutors. There was a great demand for part-time tutors. I was very lucky. I was accepted when I applied for the post. I got the job in February 1984. Everything went well until 1988. The university was closed from 1988-89 to 1992. When it was reopened in 1992, I worked there again until 1996. As a tutor, I have taught head masters, directors and staff from international schools, companies and hotels. I have earned much and spent much. For me, honesty is the best policy. An honest person never loses his/her integrity.

If you now ask me whether I want to work in most organizations with high salary of \$1000, 2000 or 3000, my answer will be yes and no. I



*If I gave up due to their limitations,
Hindu women would not get forward.*



want to work very much. But, if I work for them, I will have to go under their theme. I may have to change my course. Not to be like that, we must know our goals first. I will never do something bad just because most people do it. I want to say that you will get the right place if you really have the desire and efforts.

Freedom of Hindu Women

By tradition, men have been god of the family and women have been left behind. So, Hindu women dare not make their voice heard. I want to stand up for them. It's very important for women to get their rights on an equal basis with men. Only then, we will be able to go towards peace.

The main necessity of women is freedom. Men should be aware that it doesn't mean big TVs or other luxurious possessions at home. We must advocate for that. Men must give a helping hand so that women can sharpen their leadership skills. They must lift them up. I myself have met many Hindu men who have reached out their helping hand to me. On the other hand, there are some men who tear me down and block my way to leadership. We need to change the mindset of most men that the financially-sufficient life of a woman is perfect.

Obstacles for Ingyin May

I submitted them an official letter asking for their permission to establish an organization of Hindu women. But, they refused to permit. They said that there had already been one organization and they would give permission later. It deeply touched my heart. Honestly speaking, I was very depressed on that day. But, I decided to do as much as I could. I set up Hindu Women's Network with four or five women. I will officially register it as Ingyin May Hindu Women's Network. If I gave up due to their limitations, Hindu women would not get forward. With a small group of other women, I make donations where necessary regardless of religious status or whatever. I don't take funds from donors. If I do, I will have to act under their influence. I have been serving for the country rather than for the Hindu community only.

Triangular Peace

When we talk about the essence of peace, it's like a triangle. In the peace process, women must be at the top level. People tend to think that men are at the top. It would be quite easy to gain peace if women could apply their own capacity, qualifications and confidence. As long as they feel that their power is limited, they will not reach forward. Men will come next, followed by the youth and children

Sometimes, men must be at the top level. They are physically stronger than women. And there are some situations in which they need to come first. So, women and men may be on the same level and they may be in up-down position at times. The youth will come next in terms of experience. But, they must not be left behind because they have better qualifications. I think that peace would be close at hand only when these three sides were balanced. Most importantly, I want to say that the role of women is an essential bridge in the peace process.

Sharing is Caring

I have decided to teach English to young religious leaders from four major religions. I will do it thoroughly two or three years later. Religious leaders play a pivotal role in the peace process of the country. If they have good English skills, they will be able to study abroad and serve for the country when they come back.



Translated by Aye Chan Aung

VENERABLE DAW OAK TAMA SARI

Advocate of Social Work for the Common Good

When a woman becomes a Buddhist nun, she has to keep eight or nine precepts. As a nun, she will have to live with many vows. Actually, it's not an easy job to lead a life of such commitments. Anyway, venerable Daw Oak Tama Sari has chosen the path of nunhood since the age of 14. After learning the Buddhist scriptures, she has tried her best to nurture the youth and children with good moral in the local community. She has also played a leading role in the social work for the common good. On the other hand, she has highlighted the discriminations faced by nuns who are also women.

Life as a Nun

I was born in Pay Taw Village of Min Tone Township, Magwe region. I entered the nunhood at the age of 14. I am 47 years old now. So, I have been a nun for 33 years. After passing the Pahtamagyi religious exam, I went on to study Dhammacariya. But, I didn't reach the doctorate level. I got the M.A (Indo-Aryan) from Yangon Buddha's University (Kyi Myin Dine). My mother pursued the path of nunhood as well.



*A man in the board of trustees even said,
“It's invalid to organize Dhamma talks
with the title of nuns. It's okay to do
so by the title of monks or the board of trustees.”*



Photo: Ye Nyi Hein

When I saw the opening of a nunnery in the locality, I wanted to be a nun. I entered the nunhood, not because I was enlightened by the universal truths like impermanence and suffering, but because I was inspired by the young nuns.

As a fresher, I had to face a lot of difficulties at nunneries. But, the family and relatives supported me as much as they could. Thanks to them, I was able to learn with a light heart. Other devotees also fulfilled my needs, including exercise books. So, I didn't have to go out for collection like others.

Discriminations against Nuns

At first, I didn't notice that. I respected all the Sangha. Later, I noticed the discriminations against nuns. In 2008, I had to submit a term paper on my native place for the B.A course at university. So, I returned to my native village to find facts. I found out that there was no philanthropic organization in the area. So, I started to organize trainings for the moral and social behavior of the local youth and children.

I gradually came to realize the discriminations against nuns. They made us inferior. It was easygoing from 2008 to 2010. In 2011, we started



to organize Dhamma talks. There, they tried hard for the cancellation of our plans. A man in the board of trustees even said, “It’s invalid to organize Dhamma talks with the title of nuns. It’s okay to do so by the title of monks or the board of trustees.” I didn’t respond to his offense at that time. A monk also said, “It’s not you alone who are educated. We are educated as well. Why don’t you teach if you are that educated?” They defamed us until we could no longer give trainings in town.

Actually, we ourselves do not sermon in our Dhamma talks. We just organize them and the monks give a sermon. Those monks give back the donated money from the Dhamma talks. We use that money to reward outstanding trainees from our moral trainings. Some people and monks find it unacceptable. Only then, I have come to understand about discriminations against women.

In 2012, they set rules that children must go to the moral trainings only in the monasteries of respective quarters. It implied not to go to the nunnery. We, nuns, have faced such discriminations. Since 2008, we have been doing moral trainings and social work. So, it’s 11 years now. We have taught hundreds of children. At first, we-two nuns taught them by ourselves. Later, we also hired the volunteer teachers who have passed the matriculation exam.

The Buddha has no Gender-discriminations

I have something to tell those who discriminate us. Actually, they are the sons or disciples of the Buddha. But, they don’t listen to His teachings. The Buddha has no gender discriminations. There is just mind and matter, not man or woman. Regardless of gender status, everyone can gain the enlightenment of Nibbana if they practice the Dhamma. .

There are still many conservative ideas like not allowing women to go to the platform of the pagoda or giving space for nuns just to sit behind men even in meditation times. In the past, most nuns used to be old women. They couldn’t recite even sutras. But now, there are many young nuns who are educated. Even so, they do not get the right place.

Advocate of Social Work

I am contented with the present. After all, I should not be too greedy. Even if I can’t give moral trainings in town, I can do it in villages. We have managed to widen the circle of those trainings. We are going to do it in Paung Ti soon.

Regarding social work, I am going to teach young nuns exclusively. I will spend my whole life as a nun. At present, I am attending the trainings on social work.

It's true that we will feel peaceful when we practice the Buddha's teachings. On the other hand, we must also understand about worldly situations. We can hear the voices of our people in meetings. Only then, we will be able to sympathize with them. I want to urge all the nuns in the country to contribute to the community while practicing the Dhamma to bear the worldly vicissitudes for themselves. I want them to share the Buddha's teachings in easy-to-understand ways for the children. I don't want them to meditate in the jungle all the time. They should also come forward to serve for the community. At such times, they will get both encouragement and discouragement from the monks or religious leaders, other nuns and board of trustees. They will also face the attacks and tricks of politicians. Anyway, never give up. Please, just step forward.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

DAW TINGBA KAI RA

Tower of Strength for Jade Scavengers

Daw Tingba Kai Ra is a supervisor of the Kachin National Social Development Foundation. She has been helping to solve various problems of the locals in Phakant of Kachin State and informal jade scavengers who come there from all over the country. She has also served as a preacher for more than 20 years. Our crew went to Phakant to have an interview with her.



*Honestly speaking,
I don't know whether it will be
safe for me even to
answer this interview.*





Photo: Thant Zin Tun

Standing up for Jade Scavengers and Women

The Kachin National Social Development Foundation is an organization which has been helping the injured in the deadly accidents of jade mining operations. It has also aimed to protect women and solve their problems as there is no specific organization for women's affair here.

I have served as a preacher for more than 20 years. I have witnessed various problems faced by women, including sexual violence. So, I joined this foundation in order to give them a helping hand. I witnessed an unforgettable incident in which a truck carrying mining residues knocked over a woman named Htay Htay Win to death. Actually, it knocked over six people on the spot: two children, three men and that woman. The next day, such truck hit two female students again. I did feel unbearable for women and came into this field.

Overcoming Challenges

First of all, I am afraid that I may not be able to fully carry out my preaching task while doing these social activities. Some people criticize that I am being mixed up in both fields. Then, there are times when we have to negotiate with companies so that they take social responsibilities for their mining workers who get injured or die in the mining accidents and wipe away the tears of the victims' families. We have to demand compensations like the funeral cost. We also



have to organize the funeral prayers.

Actually, our aim is to make social negotiations for the win-win situation. We want the companies to be able to carry on with their business operations effectively and safely. Likewise, we want the victims to get their rights. But, there are misunderstandings in some situations. Kachin Independence Army (KIA) misunderstands that we are from the side of the government or the Myanmar army. In their view, we are too assertive like this due to the protection of the Myanmar army. On the other hand, the government departments and the Myanmar army think that we are very assertive with the support of KIA behind us. We have to face such misunderstandings. Anyway, we are a part of the public. We need to serve for the public. We keep such attitude in our heart. . Honestly speaking, I don't know whether it will be safe for me even to answer this interview. Some people have been murdered in public. There tends to be a dislike for women's participation here. We don't know who are more powerful in this area. We don't know how many local armed groups are here and there. We don't know who may do harm to us. We have such worries all the time.

Maternal Concerns

Sometimes, I feel burned out when I am back home. I have to struggle with stress all day long. So, there are times when I happen to shout at my children at home. I scold them or blame them or something like that. At such times, my anxiety and frustration become contagious to them. I fail to show them my loving kindness even when I am with them. I appear to give them burning anxiety rather than cool love.

I always say that I don't want my two sons to grow up. When they are young, they are under my care, even if they cannot be in my sight all the time. We are surrounded by illegal drugs and drug addicts here. It's like everyone having the mobile phone. So, I am afraid that my sons may fall into the circle of drugs.

Hope for Women

There are many organizations that are helping the women in Myitkyina and other places. But, there is none in our Phakant. I hope for a strong organization that will protect the women here.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

DAW NYUNT NYUNT THEIN

Steerswoman of the Mary Chapman Training College for Teachers and School for the Deaf

Daw Nyunt Nyunt Thein is the headmistress of the Mary Chapman School for the Deaf. She has worked on the development of women since 1978. She has also worked in the department of women under Myanmar Christian Fellowship Council for 17 years. She has carried out social work throughout her life. Consequently, she has been offered the position as the headmistress of the Mary Chapman School for the Deaf. She has been serving there for about 6 years now. During the interview, we got to know about her leadership and challenges as the headmistress of the school for the deaf, unlike other headmistresses.

Accepting the Position of the Headmistress

This school is under the administration of Christian religious organization. So, the bishop has to seek the head of the school. He requested me to serve for the school due to my social work experience. I had just left the previous job at that time. I had prior experience in the social work related to the disabled. I was also passionate about this field. So, I accepted his offer.



"I am an educated woman. I also have a job. So, I have managed to stand on my own two feet. What would it be like for those who cannot stand on their own?"

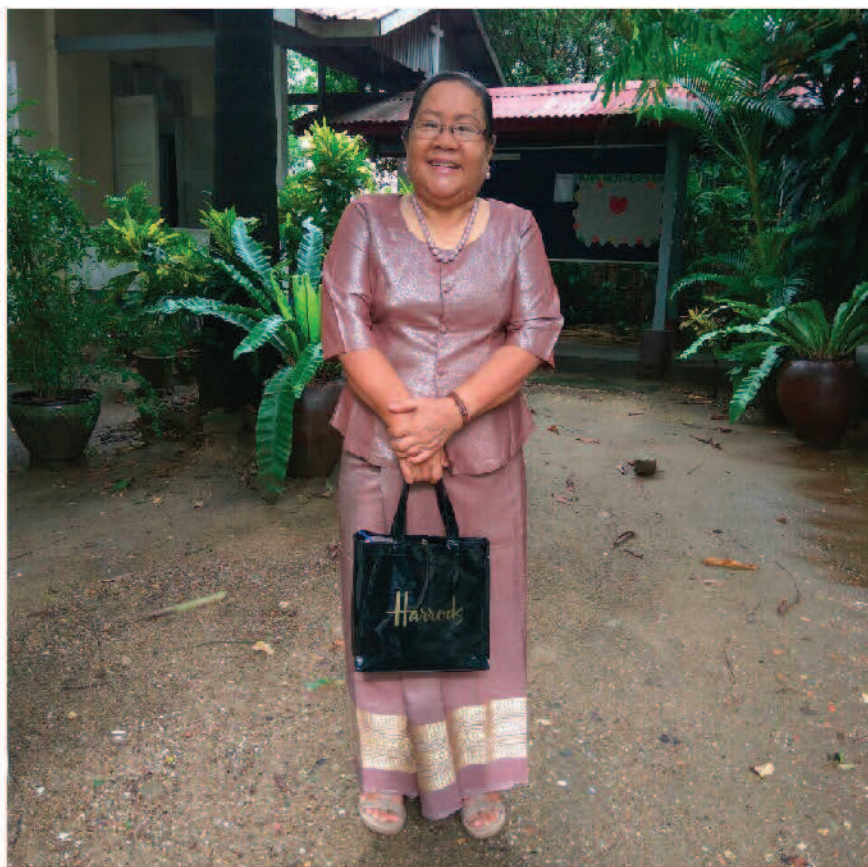


Photo: Nyunt Nyunt Thein facebook

Starting from 1978, I have worked in the department of women under Myanmar Christian Fellowship Council for 17 years. Being a Christian organization, it is just for the development of Christian women. Then, I have worked as a township supervisor for the regional development of World Vision International for 13 years. I have carried out a lot of social work throughout my life. Especially, I had to deal with the affairs of the children and the elderly when I worked for the regional development. I also contributed to the welfare of the disabled. So, I believed myself and accepted the job at the school for the deaf. In 2012, I took on the responsibility as the deputy head for one year. Since 2013, I have been the headmistress here.

They turn away their face when meeting face to face

This school has been in existence for a long time. The staff and teachers have been working here for about 20 or 30 years. The children at



this school are hearing impaired. They get spoilt at home out of pity for their disability. At school, their teachers are very lenient with them. So, I have to work hard in terms of disciplinary actions. I set disciplines one after another. So, when we are face to face on the way, they turn away their face. I have such funny incidents. But, I don't get angry with them. I just have a hearty laugh. I don't do anything bad for them. I just work hard for their development such as education, livelihood and employment. So, I have a clear conscience. They don't understand that. In their view, I am just a strict headmistress. Now, I have been working here for six years.

Intelligent Children

I managed to work a lot for their livelihood. But, I couldn't make it alone. The donors have always fulfilled my wishes. I am really thankful to God.

The children here are visually, intellectually and physically abled. Other people consider them to be stupid and dumb. Actually, they are not like that. They are unable to speak just because they cannot hear. They are very intelligent. They can remember everything just by sight. So, when I started working here, I wanted to teach them computing. I even hope them to be software developers. The donors have fulfilled everything, including that first wish. With their generous contributions, I managed to do a lot for the children. I am very pleased about that.

Faced with Blows of Life

Some people treat me as their rival or enemy. I have faced such treatment throughout my life. I am just satisfied with my work. But, I get accused with harsh words.

I never say, "No one can do like me. I am the best." But, people say behind my back that I have uttered such words. There are also some people who believe in those accusations. I am not angry with them. I never blow my own trumpet. Some people will believe whatever others say. On the other hand, there are sensible people who can distinguish right from wrong. I have gone through such circumstances and tried my best to be able to control myself.

My husband used to console me in times of hardships. But, it's not quite easy for me when I have to struggle alone. I read the bible and listen to the words of wisdom. I try to look on the bright side of everything. In this way, I have built my life.

Leading Woman

I have lost my husband for 25 years. When he passed away, we had three children. The youngest son was six years old then. The elder ones were 11 and 13 respectively. I had to struggle with those three children. I observed the life conditions of other widows. I also worked for the development of women for 17 years. So, I got to know how women have been oppressed. I understood it more when I lost my husband.

Thank Goodness! I am an educated woman. I also have a job. So, I have managed to stand on my own two feet. What would it be like for those who cannot stand on their own? It would be very difficult for them to make a living while looking after their children. It's also quite disheartening to see that some women bully each other.

Her Childhood Dreams

When I was young, I wanted to become a doctor. My family had to struggle a lot. So, I thought that a doctor would earn a good salary. But, I was afraid of bloody scenes. Another dream was to be a tuition teacher.

When I passed the matriculation exam, a friend advised me to pursue law as I was a good speaker. So, I studied law and became a lawyer for justice. At court, I came to know about judges, lawyers, plaintiffs and offenders. I found out that the law career didn't suit me. At that time, God guided me to serve for Him. I was offered the position of assistant secretary for the youth department under Myanmar Christian Fellowship Association. It's religion-based social work. At that time, only a few people were interested in such work. I accepted that job with passion. Since then, I have been in the development field.

Wish for a Peaceful Life of Teaching

I am over 60 years old now. It's time for me to retire from work. I have worked hard throughout my life. So, I feel quite burned out. I have to stay at school even on weekends. The other teachers are not very communicative. Mostly, I have to explain to the donors so that they can understand more and become more generous. It's for the welfare of the school. I have to receive visitors in the living room and deal with various problems on a daily basis.

I wish I could take a break for two or three months! I don't want to do anything. I don't want to hear anything either. I just want to travel, read books and carry on with the service for God. I have a piece of land in Aye Thar Yar near Taunggyi. I just want to build a school and serve as a teacher there.

Treat the deaf children as equals

Last, but not least, I want to request you to send the deaf children in the community to school. Except for their hearing and speech disability, they are visually, intellectually and physically abled. At least, they should be taught basic reading and writing. Please, help them to be literate people. They can learn at the schools for the deaf and other schools with inclusive education program. I want to request your support for their rights to education.

As for those under the age of 18 who lack education, please send them to the government school for their vocational trainings. Even if they are not educated, they will be able to learn how to make their own living.

Another thing is that some parents tend to be too lenient with their deaf children. Consequently, it's a little difficult to guide those spoilt children. Parents should know what their children are doing in order to avoid unwanted problems. If they allow their children to use mobile phone, they will also need to know what they are doing on the internet. On the other hand, there are some parents who turn a blind eye to their deaf children. They care more about their none-disabled children. Please, don't do like that. Please, show warm love to the deaf children and treat them as equals.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA MAY AYE THANDAR KYWEL @ MA SUU CHIT

Initiator of We are Mandalay Campaign with Respect for Diversity

Ma Suu Chit is a local resident of Mandalay. She has initiated We are Mandalay campaign with respect for diversity. She has been doing it to promote the friendliness and harmony of the townspeople, which have declined over the years. She has also aimed to revive their lovely custom of helping each other. Let's unveil some life events of Ma Suu Chit, who has a great love for Mandalay.



*Woman leaders tend
to be harshly criticized in
the community. In Myanmar,
multi-religious harmony is
a very sensitive issue.*





Photo: Zin Ko Zaw

We are Mandalay

We are Mandalay campaign was initiated at the end of 2014. It was organized again in April 2015. After that, we stopped it temporarily due to the 2015 election. We had to work for other organizations then. Unfortunately, we failed to do it in 2016. We just started it again in mid-2017.

We are Mandalay campaign is interpreted as the Mandalay people with respect for diversity. Since late 2010, conflicts have happened in Myanmar, based on religion and race. Even after conflicts, people just confine themselves to their religious and racial status.

In the past, Mandalay people used to help one another wherever they were, regardless of religious or racial status. They were under the same identity as the townspeople of Mandalay. But after religious and racial conflicts, they have become attached to their own religious and racial status. Consequently, the friendliness and harmony among them have declined. We happened to reflect on it and initiated this campaign for the revival of their helpful spirit.

Many well-known writers from Mandalay, staff working in various organizations and experts in various fields took part in our campaign. We had round-table discussions with them. After that, we organized the events in which the public could participate. We carried out various activities to promote the theme of the Mandalay people with respect for diversity, like distributing motorbike helmets with the stickers.



Challenges for a Woman Leader

Actually, being a woman, itself is a challenge for us. Woman leaders tend to be harshly criticized in the community. In Myanmar, multi-religious harmony is a very sensitive issue. As a woman supporting for that course, I often get attacked with sexual harassments via social media and phone messages. In the religious field, I am seen as an organizer rather than a leader. People wonder why I give trainings to multi-religious leaders, even though I am a woman. I once tried to report such offense for legal action. But, I was asked if I knew the perpetrators exactly. It was a time of weak legal protection then. After all, I just have to take care of my own safety.

Being Shaped Like the Trigger of Conflicts

We have been working for multi-religious harmony. There, we have found out that the case of women tends to be highlighted when it comes to the starting point of a conflict. Women have been shaped like the trigger of conflicts. There is a misconception in the community that religious and ethnic conflicts happen on the basis of sexual violence against women. And another thing is that leading women in respective fields are just seen as supporters or organizers.

Turning Points of Childhood Dreams

I was born in Mandalay, but brought up in Shwe Bo, Sagaing region. Our family runs the rice mill business. They support us both in education and sports. So, I have enjoyed a care-free life since childhood. After the 10th standard, I joined University of Distance Education in Yangon, majoring in English. I also got a degree in Computer Science from UK. After that, I came back to the town and volunteered for a civil society organization. There, I came to know about human rights violations and I ultimately came into this field.

Frankly speaking, it's not the same as my childhood dream. When we were young, we were just shaped to be doctor or engineer or computer expert. As for me, I wanted to be a computer expert. I also pursued the computer study in my higher education. But, I came to know later that other people around me couldn't enjoy a care-free life like me. I started to notice it in 2012. So, I decided to enter this field. It's not the same as the childhood dream. Sometimes, I even wonder why I have such childhood dream. It

doesn't seem relevant to me now. I end up in this field although I have considered working in the computer profession. That's the biggest turning point in my life.

Advocate for the Rights

When talking about human rights, women's rights, child's rights or whatever, we ourselves are responsible for that. While the government is most responsible for fulfilling the human rights of the citizens, we individually need to know about those rights. But, that's not enough. We ourselves need to be brave enough to ask for our rights. Or else, the responsible persons will turn a blind eye to us. And the perpetrators will carry on with their wrongdoings. So, I want to say that it's essential to advocate for our rights. There is no need to feel shy or timid.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA YIN MIN THANT

Chef with a Pair of Tasteful Hands without Silence

Ma Yin Min Thant is a chef at a hotel in Yangon. She has lost her hearing since birth. While attending the school for the deaf, she got to know a teacher from Italy. Through him, she became a chef like this. At first, she faced many difficulties as she couldn't prepare and cook the foodstuff. But, as the reward of her perseverance and efforts, she got the excellent staff award for the hotel kitchen twice within the first five months of her employment. Let's enjoy the tasty story of Ma Yin Min Thant, who wants to serve the customers with her own foodstuff.



*I am not the same as
other people. So, I still have to
learn twice than others.
Actually, it's not too tough here.*





Photo: Thant Zin Tun

Starting Point for a Pair of Creative Hands

I have to take responsibilities in the kitchen. As soon as I get to work, I help the chefs where necessary. Then, I carry out the tasks like baking and preparing the dishes. I have never done anything like this before. While attending the school for the deaf, I got to know a teacher from Italy. Through him, I started to work here for the first time.

At first, I used to feel nervous. I wondered whether I would be able to do this job. But, thanks to the support of my seniors and colleagues, I later came to know how to make it. My first difficulty was that I didn't know the English vocabulary related to the kitchen stuff, vegetables and foods. So, I made lots of mistakes. I managed to overcome it later as my seniors taught me.

Challenges for a Chef

The whole workplace was full of challenges for me when I started to work here. I didn't know how to cook. So, I had to try hard. I also faced difficulties when helping the chefs. After a year, I came to know how to cook. And I became more comfortable in the workplace. But, I am not the same as other people. So, I still have to learn twice than others. Actually, it's not too tough here. We just feel a little exhausted when we have to prepare lots of dishes for wedding receptions at the hotel or something like that. At times, I feel stressed to some extent. But, I can bear it as I am doing what I love.



Happiness in times of Kind Help

I feel blessed to be in the good environment. I used to feel inferior when I started working here. I didn't have self-confidence. I was anxious at that time. But, thanks to the helping hand of my seniors and colleagues, I have become more confident in my own ability. I have decided to keep up my efforts on the way forward. I feel joyful when the customers enjoy my food and the seniors compliment my skills. I also feel happy when my colleagues kindly offer their helping hand to me.

Clumsy day with an unforgettable incident

As far as I remember, we had to prepare a lot of dishes on that day. Among them, the senior chef handed a dish to the waiter before him. I took the dish from that waiter to serve a customer. Unfortunately, when I turned round, I collided with someone beside me and dropped all the food. At first, I didn't know what to do. Then, I picked it up quickly. I had to prepare the food again from start to finish. We got quite busy then. My senior scolded me. And the customer got irritated as well. It was such a clumsy day!

In Times of Discriminations

There are times when I get discriminated. After all, not everyone can be a good person. I feel very sad in times of discriminations. But, I just assume that they lack empathy. And I keep them out of my head. I just focus on what I have to do.

I am a hearing-impaired woman. There may be many other women who are in the same situation as mine. I want to tell them that we will face challenges and difficulties in the workplace. But, never give up no matter what. Believe in yourself. Don't be down-hearted. Learn from your experience. Don't hesitate to ask your seniors. Try as much as you can with the attitude towards success. I want to share this message.

Her Wish

I want to be a master chef. I want to create delicious cuisines. I want to prepare the dishes exquisitely and serve them to the customers. After all, I want to be a professional chef.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA THU ZAR WIN

Steering Woman of Taw Win Kayay

Sex workers have been a part of society throughout history. Yet, they remain distant and hidden. Especially, female sex workers have to face quite a lot of challenges. While trying to fulfill the basic needs of their family anonymously, they have to deal with various forms of violence in their daily life. To confront those challenges with combined efforts, a network called Taw Win Kayay (Royal Star Flower) has been set up. Ma Thu Zar Win, who used to be a steering woman of the network, has shared how they have tried to overcome the prejudice of society and seek protection for their lives.



*“The endorsement of
a good law is needed for
the female sex workers in
Myanmar.”*



Photo: Hlaing Myo Tun

Starting Point of Taw Win Kayay

I was the chair of Taw Win Kayay for four years. Now, my term is over according to its constitution. I am one of its dedicated founders. At present, I am brightening my corner in the activities related to HIV/AIDS prevention for female sex workers and some forms of violence against them.

We have tried hard to set up this network since 2009. But, we managed to implement it only in April 2011. We put all our heart and soul into it during those two years. At first, its name was Sex Workers in Myanmar Network. It was changed as Taw Win Kayay at the 2012 annual meeting for the convenience in communication with officials.

There were many challenges in the dawn of our network. We had financial and technical problems. We also faced the misconception of others that we would expand or promote the sex industry in Myanmar. But, we didn't have any objective like that. And there were only two members at first. It's not possible to make it alone. So, we had to do a lot of campaigning to be a representative organization for the common difficulties and needs of all female sex workers. Now, our Taw Win Kayay has been widely known.



Challenges of Taw Win Kayay

First of all, we face challenges in health care services. It's extremely difficult to go into KTV, massage rooms and brothels when we carry out HIV/AIDS prevention activities like blood tests for the female sex workers there. Mostly, their employers put time restraints. That's a challenge, not only for those female sex workers but also for the service providers. Another challenge is that female sex workers have to face one form of violence or another on a daily basis. Besides this, when they get arrested, it poses difficulties to their family members. Worst of all, they have to do a variety of jobs even in times of poor health. Due to these challenges, Taw Win Kayay has come into existence.

Various Forms of Violence in Daily Life

Female sex workers are women as well. But unlike other women, they face different forms of violence. In terms of sexual violence, there are cases in which one client hires a female sex worker for him alone and his fellow men also exploit her sexually and physically. Actually, female sex workers have to face various forms of violence in their daily life. They cannot avoid them at all.

There are some laws against violence. But, it is extremely difficult for the victims to report their cases. If they do so, they themselves will get arrested first because they are illegal sex workers. So, they dare not report any case.

When I was in charge of Taw Win Kayay, there were amendments to the Law against Prostitution 1949. It remains to be the bill until now. To make it a good law, the UN organizations, NGOs, the Parliament, ministries and other organizations for sex workers need to cooperate more. It can be said that the amended bill is better than the existing law. That amended bill contains some provisions that will protect our rights.

Needs of Female Sex Workers

The endorsement of a good law is needed for the female sex workers in Myanmar. Besides this, there are still a lot of things to do in order to reduce the misconceptions and violence. It's also necessary to work for the response to violence as well as HIV prevention programs with better techniques. What's more, a wide range of advocacy is needed for the systematic use of condom among men.

I want to share a message with HIV infected female sex workers. Get the medical treatment when the blood test shows that you are HIV infected. Now, we have better access to the medical treatment, including medicines and health care services. If we don't take the treatment, we will lose our lives. Most importantly, don't be down-hearted. If we feel depressed, we will fail to fulfill the basic needs of our family members. Last, but not least, the systematic use of condom is needed not to pass on HIV to others.

Don't Leave Us Behind

I have something to request the organizations for women. We are women as well. So, please reach out your helping hand to us in your programs and activities for women. Instead of doing so, some women even discriminate against us.

Another thing is that the parliament, ministries and other supportive organizations need to work in cooperation for the successful endorsement of the amended bill. In the amendments, we do not request that the sex industry must be a legal one. We just request legal protection and justice for female sex workers as they are women as well.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

MA MYAT YEE MON

YBS Driver

Most people call her ‘Ange Ma’ (little sister). Her job is to drive a passenger bus, which is the main transportation in Yangon, the commercial city of Myanmar. She is one of the female bus drivers who can drive skillfully on an equal basis with men. Before that, she has worked as a bus conductor for three years. Actually, it is not an easy job to sit at the driver’s seat and drive for an average of 10 hours a day. With Ange Ma or Ma Myat Yee Mon who is firmly holding the steering wheel from Bus Line No. (21), we have talked about her efforts to become a driver and the discriminations she faced.



*I am a woman,
but I can work like a man.
I have never driven a bus on
the route before.*



Photo: Thant Zin Tun

The Starting Point of Life as a Driver

In 2014, Sayar Ko Tin Lay told me that they would employ female bus conductors. He also urged me to do that job. I myself wanted to change work at that time. So, I took on that job as a bus conductor. Later, I entered this field of drivers.

Woman at the Wheel

Some male drivers taught me how to drive, but some didn't. I used to feel sad about that. I tried my best to be able to drive. I had to learn a lot. And I faced many obstacles on the path from a bus conductor to a driver. Some men didn't want me even to be at the wheel.

I am a woman, but I can work like a man. I have never driven a bus on the route before. I just drove here and there at the gas station. I feel a little worried as I have to drive a bus of about 50 passengers. After all, I am a woman. But, I always encourage myself that I can do it and there must be nothing I cannot do in my life.

Her Hospitality towards Passengers

When the passengers get on the bus, I bow my head and greet them- "Min Galar Par" (Auspiciousness to you). I feel joyful when they greet me back. I also feel motivated when they compliment my good driving skills before getting off the bus.

I sometimes face difficulties while driving. I have to drive for an average of 10 hours a day. It's a demanding job. I don't have a clear mind when I am sleepless for days. At such times, there is something I do for my relaxation. I play my favourite song in my phone and listen to it.

Attitude towards Success

In the past, I used to work at garment factories. Then, I'd changed my job as a bus conductor before I became a driver. Among them, this driving job matches my passion. So, my message is that we must lift ourselves up whether other people encourage us or not. We must be patient with the attitude towards success. I want to say that nothing is impossible to a willing mind.

Translated by Aye Chan Aung

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This book cannot be re-sold.



နိဇ



ပု : ဝေါင်းထုတ်လုပ်သည်

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