

Advancing Women's Empowerment and Promoting Gender Equality Fact Sheet

The United States is committed to ensuring that women and girls are able to participate fully in promoting economic growth, peace, and security in Burma as the country continues its historic transition.

While the changes sweeping the country offer women the chance to participate in public life more fully than they have in the past, major challenges remain, including deep-seated gender-based discrimination, lack of access to financial services, and alarming rates of gender-based violence. Additionally, women continue to be largely excluded from both the democratic reform and peace processes that will shape and define the new Burma.

The U.S. Embassy is proud to support programming with and for women and girls in country consistent with President Obama's National Plan of Action on Women, Peace and National Security and the January 2013 Presidential Memorandum on Coordination of Policies and Programs to Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women and Girls Globally.

Promoting the Role of Women in Public Life

- **National Women's Dialogue:** The U.S. Government funded and provide organizational support to the historic National Women's Dialogue (November 2013), marking the first time women's organizations from around the country came together to discuss issues critical to Burmese women. The three hundred participants discussed how to expand women's participation in peace and reform processes and boost efforts to prevent violence against women. The Dialogue continued with a series of trainings on leadership, conflict resolution and women's safety in the economic sphere, enabling attendees to play a more active role in their communities.
- **Women's Studies in Higher Education:** U.S.-sponsored Fulbright specialists are assisting in the development of women's studies curricula and training activities at higher education institutions throughout the country.
- **Women Preventing Communal Violence:** In 2012, the U.S. Embassy received a one-time \$1 million via the Abbott Fund's partnership with the U.S. Secretary of State's International Fund for Women and Girls to provide assistance to sixteen women's groups in conflict-affected areas to: engage in ceasefire discussions, respond to mental health needs of internally-displaced persons (IDPs), and to help shape the agenda for upcoming political discussions around peace.
- **Women's Civic Participation:** The U.S. Government is helping the Union Elections Commission (UEC) develop strategies to counteract barriers to women's participation in the electoral cycle through facilitated workshops. The UEC has pledged to incorporate targeted reforms to the voter registration process, voter education efforts, election day procedures, and increasing the role of women in political parties, thereby ensuring a greater role for women in political processes.
- **Exposure Visits to the U.S.:** The U.S. Embassy will send three women parliamentarians to the United States, as part of an International Visitor Leadership program, to learn more about the U.S. experience of constitutional reform and federalism. The experience will help prepare them to play a vital role in the current constitutional reform debate in Myanmar.

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Ensuring that Institutions and Processes are Equitable

- **Capacity-Building:** The Embassy's Small Grants Program funds small-scale projects in ethnic states across Myanmar to bolster civil society's capacity and development, including women's engagement in peace and reconciliation processes.
- **Micro-Finance:** Through a consortium of local and international NGOs, the U.S. Government is supporting the Shae Thot (The Way Forward) program, an award-winning savings-led micro-finance and micro-enterprise program. Nearly 20,000 women around the country work learn principles of savings, lending, and business literacy, and are then eligible to apply for micro-loans.
- **Reproductive Health:** USAID is supporting peer education and HIV prevention services in 19 urban centers. These programs reach 70% of the estimated 70,000 female sex workers in country, which in turn helps prevent the spread of the disease.

Increasing Engagement and Networks

- **Research and Advocacy:** The U.S. Government funded landmark new research on violence against women. The study informed the forthcoming Anti-Violence Against Women legislation currently under development and will be used to help promote prevention, improved service and response mechanisms.
- **Combating Gender-Based Violence:** In displaced communities along the Thailand border, the U.S. Government supports partners using an approach to preventing and responding to gender-based violence that addresses root causes at the community level, supports capacity development and collaboration among service providers responding to and preventing gender-based violence, and promotes gender-sensitive programming in all sectors.
- **Hearing Ethnic Voices:** More than fifty female civil society and business leaders, members of Parliament and political party representatives attended Embassy-organized roundtable discussions in Kachin, Kayah, Mon, and Rakhine States and Rangoon to highlight the perspectives and priorities of Burmese women throughout the country and incorporate their concerns into U.S. assistance strategies.
- **Training Female Journalists:** A long-time donor to independent media, the U.S. Government has trained more than 110 female journalists in an effort to increase media coverage of women's issues and build the capacity of media to report on current events with a gender-sensitive lens.
- **National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women:** The Embassy's Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE), which promotes the development of grassroots leadership skills in support of democratic processes, will host roundtable discussions to examine the Government's National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW). NSPAW, a process initiated by Government of Myanmar with civil society participation in early 2011, enshrines the Government's commitment to women's empowerment and protection and serves as a model of collaborative policy-making. The roundtable discussion will allow civil society to participate robustly in the implementation of NSPAW.