

**A STUDY OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN POLITICAL SKILLS  
EMPOWERMENT IN KAYIN STATE, MYANMAR**

**NANT MAY NANDAR KYAW**

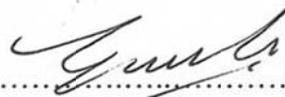
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REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
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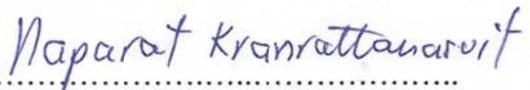
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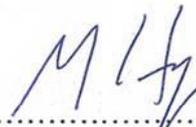
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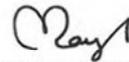


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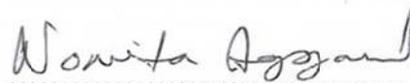
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**A STUDY OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN POLITICAL SKILLS EMPOWERMENT IN KAYIN STATE, MYANMAR**

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M.A. (HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATISATION)

THESIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE: GEETA PATHAK SANGROULA, L.L.M.,  
NAPARAT KRANRATTANASUIT, S.J.D.**ABSTRACT**

Ethnic women from Myanmar have experienced particular human rights violations related to conflicts such as violence and harassment, with limited opportunity to speak out. The objective of this thesis is to learn more about women's experiences in political skills empowerment and to assess the impact of the training led by women's rights-based organizations in Kayin State, Myanmar. The research uses in-depth interview methodology, interviewing fourteen key-informants.

Interview findings show that many interviewees felt that women's participation in voting, local-level politics and peace processes have improved after the 2015 NCA and the general elections, highlighting the particular impact of peace and democracy for marginalized groups. Besides, respondents felt that domestic violence and human rights violations cases are more monitored than before 2015 due to communities' increased awareness of women's rights. The research also found that as a result of the training, trained women have been better to engage with different key actors and more equipped in the decision-making process in communities. The trained women more involved in legal assistance for human rights violations, but often, this focuses solely on issues that specifically related to women. Besides, while they note improvements to women participating more in local-level political and peace processes, overall, women have less confidence and capacity to participate, gender discrimination, Government's weak initiatives, and face financial restraints, and only a few women become leaders in local-level politics.

The research also found that the key barriers for women are linguistic, lack of capacity, and limited access to information, as well as based on socio-cultural norms that prioritize men's leadership and decision-making and government's initiative for women's political skills is low.

The research recommends on-going coaching and mentoring for women, and advocacy against gender discrimination at all spheres mainly at the local and national political level, in order to increase women's participation in political processes at all levels. The Government also should formulate law and policy to provide at least thirty percentage reservations for women in politics and peace process. Government and political parties must take the initiative on women's political skills empowerment in line with CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

**KEY WORDS: GENDER EQUALITY / POLITICAL SKILLS/WOMEN EMPOWERMENT  
AND ADVANCEMENT/ ENGAGEMENT / KEY ACTORS / PEACE  
PROCESS / POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

80 pages

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGIPP	Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process
BPfA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
EAOs	Ethnic Armed Organizations
GEN	Gender Equality Network
GR	General Recommendations
KNU	Karen National Union
KNWO	Karenni National Women’s Organization
KWAT	Kachin Women’s Association of Thailand
KWEG	Karen Women Empowerment Group
KWO	Karen Women Organization
MEDA	Mennonite Economic Development Associates
NCA	National Ceasefire Agreement
NSPAW	National Strategic Plan of Advancement for Women
POVAW	law on Protection and Prevention of Violence against Women
VT	Village Tract
WLB	Women’s League of Burma
WON	Women’s Organization Network ((Kayin)
WPN	Women Peace Network – Arakan
WPS UNSCR	Women Peace and Security United Nations Security Council

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Myanmar's Political, Social, and Economic Situation**

Myanmar consists of seven states, seven regions, and the Union territories. Myanmar is one of the most significant countries in the world that severely restricts fundamental freedoms, civil, political, and economic rights. Seventy percent of the population lives in rural areas, and 52 percent of the populations are women (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). According to the UNESCO (2016), women literacy rate of Myanmar (aged 15 to 24 years) is 84.41 percent, 71.85 percent (for 24 to 65-year-old women), and 49.2 percent (for women older than 65) (UNESCO, 2016).

Since independence from British colonial rule in 1948, the people of Myanmar have faced continued poverty, displacement, and human rights violations. Ethnic minorities are one-third of the country's population, and the vast majority of natural resources lie in the conflict areas (Asian Century Institute, 2016). Kayin State is one of the significant states affected by protracted conflicts since 1949, and women faced particular human rights violations linked to conflicts such as violence and harassment, with limited opportunity to speak out. Since 1950, the KNU operates as *de facto* government in South-eastern Myanmar and maintains the administrative divisions for Kayin State and other areas as the seven districts marked as under the KNU's territories. As a result of on-going armed conflicts, the Karen society has lived in the Government-controlled area, KNU controlled area, and mixed-controlled area (both Government and Ethnic Armed Organization's administration) (UNHCR South-East Myanmar Information Management Unit, 2014, p. 3). According to the Myanmar Census (2014), the literacy rate in Kayin State is 74.4 percent lower than the Union literacy rate (89.5 percent). Literacy rate for male in Kayin State is 78.4 percent and 70.9 percent for females (Myanmar Census, 2014).

In 2011, the military Government won an election and took power under the leadership of President U Thein Sein. Under his leadership, Myanmar saw a slight

relaxation of the strict military control, as well as steps towards peace and an opening of international relations. In 2012, the Government initiated bilateral ceasefires with a dominant Ethnic Armed Organization in South-eastern Myanmar; and in 2015, the Karen ethnic armed organizations became the signatory to the National Ceasefire Agreement. Later that year a civilian government, the National League for Democracy (NLD) under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, was elected. These changes have led many civilians to believe for improvements in the human rights situations and women's empowerment specifically (Asian Century Institute, 2016).

Women have shown extraordinary resilience in the conflict areas, even though they face the effects of socio-economic inequality and political exclusion. Women also suffer violence and inequality from inadequate access to justice, intense discrimination due to cultural norms, values and practices, and the low capacity as human rights advocates to provide quality and accessible services (UN Women-Asia Pacific, n.d.). However, only one female minister holds a Union portfolio, and one woman holds the position of chief minister from Kayin State. Moreover, the NCA has only two female members out of a total of 32 members: one from the government side and one from the ceasefire coordination team (UN Women-Asia Pacific, n.d.).

This research has chosen a range of community-based, women's rights-based civil society and non-government organizations, and their trained women as respondents. As 98 non-government and civil society organizations are working in Kayin State that responds to different sectors of development including women's needs (MIMU 2017, Overview of the Sep 2017 3W Kayin State, pp. 1-7). Many of Myanmar women's rights-based NGOs were established in the late 1990s and early 2000s to address the lack of women's rights, lack of women's participation, and instability of Myanmar politics (WPN 2015; WON 2015; KWAT 2016, cited in Campbell, 2016, pp. 11-12).

There are more women's rights-based organizations and community-based organizations working for women's empowerment in Kayin State, Myanmar after 2015. These are some women's rights-based organizations such as WON (Kayin), KWO, and KWEG; mainly work on women's rights, gender equality, and Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and on Women Peace, and Security. There are INGOs such as

MEDA which is mainly working for women's economic empowerment and local CSOs such as LRC and KSCN.

KWEG is also a partner organization of MEDA that is implementing the project for women's economic empowerment in Kayin State, Myanmar. KSCN is a Karen Civil Society Network that mainly works for capacity building for the civil society organizations and also trains women for the peace process. WON (Kayin) became a registered organization in 2016 and worked with lawyers to assist the GBV case, women peace and, security. LRC mainly works for the local rights program and vocational training to the youths.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

CEDAW Shadow Report (2016) mentions that land-grabbing displaces women and leaves them vulnerable to trafficking, violence, and exploitation. Women and girls suffer from lack of access to educational opportunities due to displacement, land-grabbing, drug dependence, loss of physical security, lack of infrastructure, and economic hardship (Women's League of Burma, 2016, p. 13).

Gender Equality Network states that women from some conflict-affected areas in southeastern Myanmar, Rakhine State, and Kachin State faced gender-based violence (cited in United Nations Human Rights Council: Universal Periodic Review Myanmar, 2015, p. 5). Harvard Law School International Human Rights Clinic highlighted that "the military had perpetrated crimes against humanity and war crimes during the first year of the 2005-2008 military offensive in Kayin State" (cited in UNHCR: UPR Myanmar Report, 2015, p. 6). The AGIPP also states that woman's organizations mentioned in reports that the Myanmar military used the weapon of rape and sexual violence against ethnic minority groups as part of the Government's warfare methods (Women's League of Burma, 2014, cited in Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process, 2016, p. 10).

The research problems are as follows:

### **1.2.1 Political Participation**

The Voices of Myanmar Women Research Report notes that women face significant obstacles in participating in political and public life, including gender stereotyping and discrimination, lack of government's support, and lack of awareness (WON, 2016, p. 40).

### **1.2.2 Conflict-related Violence**

The civilians become the victims of war in the context of ongoing armed conflicts including killings, sexual violence against women and girls, arbitrary arrest, torture, forced displacement, forced labor, recruitment of child soldiers, and enforced disappearance (Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma/ALTASEAN-Burma) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), 2015, cited in the United Nations Human Rights Council: UPR, 2015, p. 4). CEDAW Shadow Report (2016) states that some women leaders face threats while traveling to the campaign or other public events (WON, 2016, p. 8).

### **1.2.3 Economic**

Women may not benefit from the development's initiatives and are often negatively impacted by these initiatives. For example, The Voices of Myanmar Women Research Report (2016) mentions that women face illegitimate land appropriation and have little say in development projects affecting them. They then face barriers in accessing justice to address these grievances (WON, 2016, p. 24).

### **1.2.4 Education**

The Voices of Myanmar Women Research Report indicates that many women and girls lack education, particularly in the conflict areas. This conflict has implications for accessing health services, employment, and political participation (WON, 2016, p.33).

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This research has three main questions:

- 1) How have women's rights-based organizations played the role to overcome the challenges to achieve the women's political skills empowerment in Kayin State, Myanmar?
- 2) How far have women been engaged and participated?
- 3) To what extent did women overcome the challenges of applying skills for engaging and political participation in Kayin State, Myanmar?

### **1.4 Objectives of Research**

Firstly, this research aims to assess the achievement of work undertaken by women's rights-based organizations in order to improve women's political skills empowerment in Kayin State. The achievement is primarily measured through the assessment of the women's rights-based organizations themselves, and whether they face challenges in identifying women to train, retaining the trained women, and ensuring the level and impact of those women's subsequent participation.

Secondly, this thesis aims to know more about trained women's experience of applying their political skills when engaging with key actors in their communities and also how to overcome the barriers. Thirdly, this thesis aims to know more about women's experiences of local-level political participation in Kayin State. Finally, this research aims to provide recommendations to government and non-governmental organizations for improved activities, advocacy for law, and policy-enhancement for supporting women's political skills empowerment.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To learn the experiences of women's rights-based organizations in order to achieve the women's political skills empowerment in Kayin State, Myanmar
- 2) To understand more about trained women's experiences of applying political skills and local-level political participation

## **1.5 The Significance and Scope of the Study**

Other research has been conducted in the area of women's empowerment in Myanmar that further focuses on organizations, and not totally from the perspective of women's experiences. This research of the perspectives of women's experience in applying political skills has not yet been undertaken in Kayin State, Myanmar. This research found that the importance of political changes and the 2015 NCA have improved the women's capacity for legal awareness, leadership, engagement with key actors, the peace process, security, and the local-level peace process. The women have some awareness of active citizenship, voter education, gender equality, and right awareness after 2015. The numbers of female village tract administrators are increasing in the less conflict-affected area, and more women MPs are voted for in the 2015 general elections in Kayin State.

Gender equality in all spheres mainly in the political field is far from being achieved in Myanmar, as men take the vast majority of leadership positions in the political and economic sectors due to social and cultural norms and gender discrimination. Myanmar cultural norms determine men as the household leaders, and few female household leaders are found in Kayin State (ActionAid Myanmar, Data of Southeast Rehabilitation Project in Kayin State, 2015).

Most women's rights-based organizations focus on women's empowerment to increase women's participation in rural development and political processes in Myanmar after the political changes in 2015 that challenged some socio-cultural norms. This study is aiming to provide the scope for understanding the effectiveness and challenges of increasing women's political skills and empowered by women's rights-based organizations to participate in politics in Kayin State, Myanmar.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an analysis of current research to understand better what is meant by political skills empowerment, the conceptual framework for women's empowerment relevant to Myanmar, the context, and the programs of non-governmental organizations in improving women's political skills. This chapter also expresses the theoretical framework of why and how women get involved in politics in Myanmar and the global approaches on women's political skills empowerment.

#### **2.2 Definitions of Political Skills, Political Empowerment, and NGOs**

##### **2.2.1 Political Skills**

Political skills can be defined as “the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and or organizational objectives” (Ferris et al., 2007, p. 291). Mintzberg (1983) observes that political skills are the practical use of skills resulting in encouragement, special pleading, and consultation (Mintzberg, 1983, cited in Ferris et al. 2007, p. 291).

Some authors identify four critical dimensions of political skills, which are the social genius, acquainted impact, communication skills, and apparent honesty. Authors define social genius as the smart observing skills which enable effective social interactions and dealings with others. The acquainted impact is a powerful influence on others that allows people to adapt and elaborate on their behavior to a different situation. Communication skills can build strong beneficial alliances, high negotiation skills, and decision-making skills in conflict management. Apparent

honesty is having high levels of integrity, authenticity, sincerity, and being genuine (Ferris et al., 2007, p. 292).

Political skills refer to the skills needed for higher engagement and participation in local-level decision making processes and forum and the ability to hold decision-makers to be accountable. This may include leadership, facilitation, consultation, public speaking, understanding political process, legal awareness including frameworks for women's advancement and equality, awareness of Government of Myanmar and Non-State actors (NSA) services and decision making bodies, transparency, and accountability in Myanmar (the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1997), the Myanmar National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) (2013-2022), and a 19-chapter draft of National Law on Protection and Prevention of Violence against Women (PoVAW), Myanmar, 2015).

### **2.2.2 Political Empowerment**

Women's empowerment can be defined as the legal, political, and social rights of women being equal to men. According to Young (1993), empowerment means women can raise their rights to the State for support and take initiatives and leadership to help the society for change (cited in Rahman, 2013, p. 11).

### **2.2.3 Non-government Organizations**

According to the UN Guiding Principles, civil society organizations are voluntary organizations as well as community-based organizations which are working for non-profit but for social cohesion (UN Guiding Principles). According to Prof. Peter Willetts, "At the UN, virtually all types of private bodies can be recognized as NGOs. They only have to be independent of government control, not seeking to challenge governments either as a political party or by a narrow focus on human rights, non-profit-making, and non-criminal" (Willetts, n.d).

### **2.3 Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Myanmar**

Madeleine Weaver's thesis entitled *Women's Participation in Myanmar's Peace Process: Towards a New Narrative* (2018) explores relevant international frameworks for women and Myanmar's peace process. Weaver (2018) notes that success for women's rights and gender equality, particularly in former peace processes and agreements, can be measured by the extent to which the 'Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)' frameworks have been integrated. The most important of those frameworks are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). These frameworks are highly relevant to women's political participation more generally, as the works at the local level are informed by broader regional and global movements towards women's empowerment. Maximum participation of women in politics and public life is one of the reliable indicators of a fully-developed country (CEDAW, General Recommendation No.23). Weaver (2018) also reveals the international commitment of Myanmar on the rights of women as the followings.

The Government of Myanmar ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) in 1997, promising significant changes to political life in the country and later for the peace process itself. However, many of these changes have yet to materialize. Several factors are limiting the implementation of CEDAW in Myanmar. The CEDAW Committee's 2016 report noted, in particular, the "lack of clarity on the applicability of the Convention," and the "lack of visibility of the convention among the public" (Weaver, 2018).

Weaver (2018) also mentions that the Committee reported that Myanmar's national legal framework is inherently incompatible with CEDAW. The patriarchal-based political norms and practices may have been a result of the country's colonial heritage, traditional norms, and legislative foundations. Additionally, Myanmar's 2008 Constitution obstructs the implementation of CEDAW, with a long list of clauses serving to prohibit women from gaining equal rights to men. For example, military personnel is granted immunity from human rights violations and gender-based violence through Article 343 (B), while Article 352 states that "nothing shall prevent the appointment of men to the positions that are suitable for men only" (Weaver, 2018). As such, some important positions are reserved only for men in a document

which also states that there shall be no discrimination based on race, birth, religion, or sex. The contradictory and discriminatory nature of the constitution is evident, thereby curtailing CEDAW from operating effectively in Myanmar.

Weaver's research (2018) has found that many women's organizations use CEDAW's reports and recommendations as a tool for advocacy approach and to hold their government accountable for its responsibilities as a CEDAW-signatory state party. Weaver (2018) found that Myanmar's military and Government might not be considering a full application of CEDAW, but the women's rights-based organizations and civil society organizations' advocacy strategies and campaign become center for women's empowerment applied to an international treaty. In this way, women's organizations in Myanmar are seen to be emboldened by international legal and institutional frameworks (Weaver, 2018, p. 30).

Myanmar has shown its commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). The declaration outlines state commitments to enhance the rights of women, and it remains perhaps the most comprehensive global policy framework aimed at advancing gender equality, development, and peace. The BPfA's five-yearly progress was reviewed by The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to recommend the states to ensure the effectiveness of women and girls' participation at all levels of the decision-making process, peace process, peace building, recovery, and conflict resolution (AGIPP, 2017). These reviews, combined with active encouragement from the international community, provide momentum to improve the position of women in Myanmar; however, according to Weaver, this has seen mixed success (AGIPP, 2017, cited in Weaver, 2018, p. 30).

The Myanmar government initiated its own ten-year National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) in 2013, based on the principles of CEDAW and BPfA. This framework is used to address the critical issues faced by women in Myanmar. These formal guidelines set relevant precedents through which the Government can address the lack of women's participation in public life and the peace process. However, Weaver (2018, p. 33) argues that Myanmar's commitment to these principles or treaties are very prominent that the process of policy to implementation action is yet to be accomplished. With implementation support underway and the UN indicators on WPS and the implementation of NSPAW in place,

Weaver (2018) believes there is potential for political reform, depending to a large extent on the willingness of Myanmar society and the Government.

## **2.4 Women's Political Participation in Myanmar**

Myanmar's women were granted the right to vote in 1935 by the Government; Myanmar is one of the earliest countries in Asia. Myanmar endorses the Beijing Declaration in 1995 and to become a signatory to CEDAW in 1997. The NSPAW identified a key priority as ensuring women's equal participation and leadership in governance at all levels of society (The Asia Foundation and Pan Htee Eain, 2017).

When the women's rights-based organizations advocate of reserving 30 percent of women inclusion in politics, the responses from the Government are typical. If the women are educated, they will be automatically included in politics and decision-making process, and there is no need to reserve a quota for women's participation in politics. Therefore, the Salween Institute and WLB argue that women are educated enough according to the UNESCO. These organizations claim that 34.2 percent of females and 25.7 percent of male finish high school education, and 65.2 percent of females attended pre-bachelor degree programs; and women are constituting 80.5 percent of students in master's degree programs and women are 80.8 percent of those finishing Ph.D. Programs (UNESCO, cited in Salween Institute for Public Policy and the Women's League of Burma, 2018, p. 6).

Author Shwe Shwe Sein Latt (2017) argues that the cultural norm is one of the barriers that women face to hinder their access to their rights and to be candidates in politics as Myanmar is a male-dominant country. Other barriers women face are low support from family and society for political participation, security and safety concern when they travel, limited mobility or access to transport, responsibilities for all domestic labor, and dependence on spouses for financial supports. Women's participation in public and political life in Myanmar remains low, and women are notably absent from national and sub-national governance systems, decision-making and leadership opportunities within many ethnic communities (Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, 2017).

The 2010 general elections in Myanmar saw a transition from more than six decades of the military Government to a civilian Government. Members were elected to a new Assembly of the Union (*Pyidaungsu Hluttaw*), consisting of an upper house or “House of Nationalities” (*Amyotha Hluttaw*) and a lower house or “House of Representatives” (*Pyithu Hluttaw*). Parliaments were also established for the 14 states and regions (The Asia Foundation and Pan Htee Eain, 2017, p. 1).

The representation of women in Parliament was limited with only 28 seats out of a total of 466 seats occupied by women (6 percent) (four seats in the Upper House and 24 in the Lower House). In January 2014, two female MPs were appointed to the 166 seats reserved for the military. There were no female MPs appointed from the military before 2014. In the State and regional-level parliamentary elections, women won 25 out of 659 elected seats (3.8 percent). Only one female military MP from Yangon Region Parliament was appointed at the state/regional level in 2014. In six—Kayah, Kayin, Chin, and the Mon States, and the Sagaing, and Tanintharyi regions—out of the 14 states and regions, no women were elected. Shan State had eight women MPs, and Yangon Region had six women MPs (Mandalay and Magway Regions had one woman MP each). Only four women out of 14 states and regions parliaments held ministerial positions (The Asia Foundation and Pan Htee Eain, 2017, p. 2).

The 2015 general elections was a significant opportunity for women to participate in representational governance, and the number of women parliamentarians increased significantly to a total of 151 elected seats across both national and state/regional levels. The number of female representatives in the National Parliament increased from 6 percent to 13.7 percent of all elected MPs when 23 women parliamentarians entered the upper house and 44 in the lower house. The military only appointed two female MPs in the lower house. When including the appointed military MPs, the number of female MPs declined from 13.7 percent to 10.5 percent (The Asia Foundation and Pan Htee Eain, 2017, p. 2).

There are more than 90 political parties in Myanmar, but few have concrete policies that promote women’s participation or set aside a space for women candidates. Regarding the survey of 34 leading political parties led by Phan Tee Eain in December 2014, 60 percent of party members are men, and 40 percent are women.

The Central Executive Committees (CECs) members of political parties are 90 percent male. Only six percent of women hold decision-making positions in the state/regional and district-level party organization structures. Women were only two out of 33 ministerial positions in President Thein Sein's Government (2011-2016).

Daw Mya Mya Ohn Khin was appointed the minister of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement in December 2012 as Myanmar's first female cabinet minister in 60 years. Daw Ba Maung Chain from Kayin State was the last female minister in 1953. Another female minister was Daw Khin San Yi, formerly a deputy minister of the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, who was appointed as a minister for the Ministry of Education on February 2014. Six women were appointed in deputy ministerial positions, and only 42 women administrators are appointed out of 16,785 ward and village administrators. No women found among 330 township administrators. No women found among the seven Supreme Court justices, and only 17 women are found among the 52 High Court judges in the 14 state and regional High Courts. Only two female chief ministers from Kayin and Tanintharyi out of 14 chief ministers of the state/regions are all NLD members (The Asia Foundation and Pan Htee Eain, 2017, pp. 3-4).

The significant challenges for Parliament are 25 percent unelected military candidates occupying seats according to the Myanmar Constitution of 2008, and only 75 percent are elected candidates. The capacity of MPs is also critical to strengthening the Parliament (legislative institution). The greatest challenge is that the Government appointed only the new ministers to a government ministry, and the government officials stay the same, so it is hard to reform the system. Significantly, MPs have not yet implemented an effective mechanism for checks and balances to the executive and judiciary branch (Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, 2017).

Women representatives generally came to their positions in the 2011-2016 parliaments with a high level of education. For women in the national Parliament, the levels of education are the same or exceeded that of their male colleagues. Eighty-six percent of women MPs in the national Parliament held at the minimum the equivalent of a bachelor's degree, 17 percent had post-graduate degrees, including 6.7 percent who obtained doctorates. In comparison, 76 percent of men in the national Parliament

had the equivalent of a bachelor's degree, 7.6 percent have post-graduate degrees, and 1.3 percent held doctorates (The Asia Foundation and Pan Htee Eain, 2017, p. 6).

According to the women's exchange workshop, women MPs express that they face gender discrimination at the Parliament level and in the executive body such as lack of respect and appreciation, lack of empowerment and promotion, rejection of their suggestions, discrimination due to being a women MP and ageism. The role of women MPs is crucial to improve their performance as change agents, representing the citizens, and overcoming challenges.

Additionally, the Government also needs to mainstream and support a bill for reserving seats for women in Parliament and adding quotas or other constitutional frameworks to enhance women's participation as there is a need to improve the political will to improve women's participation in politics in political parties and parliaments. Moreover, political parties need to develop gender-sensitive policies and guidelines to increase women's participation in the leadership role and candidate list. Furthermore, there should be aware of the obligation of parliaments to adopt the Government's budget and to allocate more resources to gender issues (Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, 2017).

#### **2.4.1 Barriers**

Women face barriers to political participation in the area of leadership, legal, cultural, and institutional. The Myanmar Constitution of 2008 and other existing laws are examples of legal limitation for women's participation. In Section 6 of the Myanmar Constitution enforces "enabling the defense services to be able to participate in the national political leadership role of the State" thereby creating a military quota of 25 percent, removing the opportunity to have elected representatives in a quarter of the parliamentary seats. The military quota is against a proposed bill that calls for a minimum of 30 percent female representation in Parliament (Salween Institute and the Women's League of Burma, 2018).

Section 252 states that "to obtain a list of sustainable Defense Services personnel nominated by the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services for Ministries of Defense, Home Affairs and Border Affairs"; therefore, significantly,

three ministries do not accept non-military personnel, which are institutional discrimination (Salween Institute and the Women's League of Burma, 2018).

Section 253 of the Myanmar Constitution states that: "the Union shall upon specified qualifications into being fulfilled, in appointing or assigning duties to civil service personnel, not discriminate for or against any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, based on race, birth, religion, and sex." This section also does not prevent men from being appointed to positions that are suitable for women. The State fails to promote women's political participation and skills empowerment even so the Union Election law and the Political Party registration Law do not limit the women's participation (Salween Institute and the Women's League of Burma, 2018).

Myanmar has experienced colonial and military dictatorship rule, and the institutions created are inherently patriarchal. Women are designated to be mothers, sisters, and wives, whose role is supporting their husbands. Women are not seen to be leaders of their families, which limits them from accessing other leadership roles. According to The Asia Foundation survey of women parliamentarians (2011-2016), the significant obstacles to women's participation are the point of view of voters generally, shortfall of support from female voters, and potential female candidates' less of confidence (Salween Institute and the Women's League of Burma, 2018).

There are more than 20 EAOs currently operating, but very few organizations have women at the executive committee level, although the majority of EAOs have adopted the principle of maintaining a minimum of 30 percent women's representation at every level. Since the 1962, military coup and military expansion, has used sexual violence as a tool of war. The lack of individual and collective safety prohibited women from getting their rightful place in the peace building process in Myanmar (Salween Institute and the Women's League of Burma, 2018, pp. 8-9).

## **2.5 Women's experiences**

### **2.5.1 Achievements and Challenges**

Since 1961, when the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) trained the first woman delegate, 40 percent of their staff working in the field has been

women. Women have been involved in humanitarian assistance, including the promoting of international humanitarian law among the armed groups. Even though women who lived in the conflict areas are often helpless and marginalized, women have been able to overcome the odds and become peace promoters and community leaders following NGO training. The challenges of the women's leadership are fundamental decision-making process regarding the security and access to resources (Haeri and Puechguirbal, 2010, p. 104).

For example, in the region of Casamance, Senegal, women leaders are allowed to attend and speak at community meetings. At these meetings, the operating NGOs ensure that women had chances to be heard, and the women's ability was strengthened to respond to the needs of the whole population (Haeri and Puechguirbal, 2010, pp. 113-121).

In Myanmar, women face the barriers of cultural norms and political discrimination when they try to participate in the peace process (Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process, 2016, p. 3). A minority of women participates at the local-level in Myanmar, and when women have experience as elected leaders; the decision-making processes at the local-level influences their leadership roles (UNDP Myanmar, 2015, p. 7). The author mentions that the barriers to women's participation in subnational governance are chiefly traditional norms that give authority to men over women. Women lack confidence and opportunities to gain skills and experiences in politics, as men always take decision making (UNDP Myanmar, 2015, p. 14). Due to these social norms, women are less likely to build up the experience, skills, and confidence needed to be elected into local level office (UNDP Myanmar, 2015, p.15).

## **2.6 Organizations' Experiences**

### **2.6.1 Achievements**

Cruz's Master's Thesis entitled *Empowerment of Women during Conflict and Post-Conflict Phases and the Role of Humanitarian Aid Organizations in Supporting Women's Newfound Empowerment Gained during Conflict* (2016)

outlines the case study of women in Colombia that explores the sustainability of women's empowerment after conflict.

Throughout a peace process or agreement to end a conflict, new priorities are established regarding social and economic reconstruction. Cruz argues that even if women held significant public roles during periods of conflict, "they are frequently not prepared for new challenges brought on in a post-conflict phase with new actors and men returning from conflict" (2016, p. 32). Cruz (2016) finds that this is due to women often not being well enough informed; not well represented in any decision-making processes; and lacking access, assistance, and support related to the reconstruction process. Besides, the patriarchal social structure limits their freedom and capacity for social and political participation.

Cruz finds that, due to this, it is essential "during the conflict to prepare women for the post-conflict phase to help them to capitalize all their gains related to empowerment made during a conflict in order to contribute to changing the imbalance of power" (Cruz, 2016, p. 32). The author sees the post-conflict phase as a potential opportunity for women if they are prepared in order to take advantage of the social, political, and economic changes that can result from a peace process.

*La Ruta Pacifica de Mujeres* is one of Colombia's leading women's civil society network organizations and is well recognized regarding the ongoing peace process between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (Cruz, 2016). Cruz uses *Ruta Pacifica* as one example of an organization able to support the empowerment of women during conflict, as well as to increase the power and standing of itself as a women's organization.

*Ruta Pacifica* was established in 1996 as a grassroots initiative, and by the time of this study comprised more than 315 civil society organizations and women's groups across 11 regions in Colombia representing various social sectors. As a feminist movement, it is working towards the negotiated settlement of the armed conflict in Colombia; and as an advocacy group, it seeks to increase the visibility of the effects of the conflict on women's lives (Cruz, 2016). *Ruta Pacifica* focuses on breaking down paradigms and stereotypes in order to challenge the way women are seen and perceived. In 1996, they led a national march mobilizing more than 2,000 women from different regions throughout Colombia to convene in the Urabá region,

an area profoundly affected by conflict. This was an act of solidarity to accompany and support the women victims in a way that had not been seen before; it was the first time in Colombia's history that women "were seen demonstrating in such large numbers and taking a political stance without the leadership or involvement of men" (Cruz, 2016, p. 34).

Through involvement in Ruta Pacifica, women have gained vital skills such as confidence, recognition, and levels of participation in citizen-driven peace initiatives. Cruz (2016) argues that women overcame fear, helplessness, and indifference related to the conflict and gained respect from armed actors. Furthermore, these skills were developed during the conflict, and by the time of the demobilization process in 2006, the organization was strong enough to participate effectively in public debates. Humanitarian aid organizations are sometimes invited to participate in the peace process as observers, so the organization used the opportunities to build a platform to advocate for women's inclusion and participation.

Cruz (2016) observes that the key elements for the success of Ruta Pacifica include not only the commitment and bravery of the women involved but also the diversity of its members to include rural and poor women, as well as favorable external factors in the parallel development of public policies in Colombia toward fostering women's civic participation.

### **2.6.2 Challenges**

Many women require confidence building, new skills, and a new vision for the future to increase their participation in public affairs and politics. The humanitarian aid organizations started in 1949 when the Geneva Convention was established. At that time, humanitarian aid organizations did not commonly consider sex and gender roles as essential. Moreover, humanitarian-aid organizations did not recognize that men and women are equal in a conflict context. Between 1950 and 1970, women were seen as not direct beneficiaries of NGOs' programming. Humanitarian organizations also sometimes were weak in the understanding of the local context; moreover, the organizations had their agenda and visions of empowerment that, in turn, created conflicts with the community. UN Women express that a significant obstacle "in maintaining women's empowerment in post-conflict scenarios is the gap between the

humanitarian aid and development fields, which also underpins the short-term nature of humanitarian action” (Cruz, 2016, pp. 27-31).

One of the biggest challenges of empowering women’s activities in Myanmar was the counterchecking by the Government (KNWO, 2015, cited in Campbell, 2016, p. 27). Another challenge is that the community leaders are afraid to let women to become educated about politics because of fear of the consequences from the Government or the military (WON, 2015, cited in Campbell, 2016, p. 27). Entrenched norms are one of the most significant challenges mentioned by the NGOs. Scholars argue that to enforce women’s rights and their political participation in Myanmar with the authoritarian regimes and entrenched negative norms towards women is a significant challenge for the NGOs (Hunt et al., 2015, cited in Campbell, 2016).

Educating women at the grassroots level is a critical tool for NGOs in Myanmar to empower women in the long term. The Kachin Women’s Association of Thailand has founded the Kachin women’s union based in Kachin state. One women leader from Kachin women’s union became a representative of the Kachin State Democratic Party (KWAT, 2016, cited in Campbell, 2016, p. 31). This story presents the NGOs’ activities and how they face difficulties to empower women about their rights to participate in politics in the conflict areas of Myanmar. According to the Karenni National Women Organization( KNOW), the organization uses safe houses as places to educating women about their rights, counseling, and giving education about politics and legal guidance (KNWO, 2015, cited in Campbell, 2016, p. 31). The challenges found included social norms, the political context, religious influences, and donors’ demands when NGOs implement gender-based programming in Myanmar.

### **2.6.3 Barriers to Women’s Political Participation and Economic**

#### **Hardship**

Oxfam UK is well known for its work on women’s empowerment within its international development programming. Their 2009 resource *Women’s Leadership and Participation: Case Studies on Learning for Action* (edited by Joanna Hoare and Fiona Gell) explore eight case studies from different countries and regions, showcasing a variety of women’s leadership, empowerment and political participation

approaches. The importance of this work, and learning from different contexts, is essential as women in both the developing and the developed world are affected disproportionately through poverty. Hoare and Gell state that “This poverty is experienced not just as material deprivation, but also as marginalization, which means that those living in poverty often have no, or little opportunity to influence the political, economic, and social processes and institutions which control and shape their lives and keep them trapped in a cycle of poverty” (Oxfam GB, 2009, p. 1).

In particular, Chapter 8 of *Advocacy and national elections: women’s political participation in Honduras* (pp. 81-91) is relevant to this study on women’s participation in Myanmar. The project described in the case study saw relevant links established between women’s rights organizations and women elected to Congress.

Honduras is the third poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbean after Haiti and Nicaragua. Eighty percent of the population lives under the poverty line, and gender inequality makes women particularly vulnerable to poverty, limiting their access to employment opportunities, assets, and public services such as health care, education, and water and sanitation. Honduras is a strongly patriarchal society where the church influences social, economic, and political life. The cultural norms establish women as housekeepers and caregivers. Lack of education, in particular, keeps women in poverty; many older women are uneducated, and most girls only started going to school in 2009.

The current political system, while technically democratic, does not address the needs of the majority, and in particular, ignores the needs of women and fails to improve gender equality. The two dominant political parties serve the interests of the economic elites and are largely unaccountable to the majority of the population and resistant to democratic reforms. The research states that, in particular, “traditionally these elites have ignored and marginalized women as political subjects.” This is evident in the fact that after 50 years of women’s suffrage, in 2001 only 7.4 percent of representatives in the national Congress were women, and, apart from during a brief period in the early 1980s, the number of women who are mayors has never exceeded ten percent” (Oxfam, 2009, p. 82).

Oxfam worked with two feminist organizations on a campaign aimed at changing policies and practices to increase women’s political participation in the 2005

presidential, congressional, and local elections. The campaign comprised the following two steps: lobbying for electoral reform supportive of women's rights and pro-poor and educating and mobilizing the voters.

### **A. Electoral Reform**

The two central demands were a 50 percent quota for women candidates in the election and an open preferential system for election. Political parties were asked to develop a gender equality plan and also be increasingly accountable to the electorate. One of the critical strategies of the campaign was working in alliance with a coalition of civil society organizations that supported electoral reform, leading to the coalition including the goal of equal representation of women in its agenda. The Electoral and Political Organizations Law came into force in 2005, with electoral changes that introduced an open preferential system and provided photos of candidates to assist illiterate voters. This system was a key success of the campaign.

Congress also agreed to include the 50 percent women quota; however, the quota was set at 30 percent in reality and did not specify where women candidates should be placed on electoral lists. In 2005 election, only four out of twelve factions within the two main political parties complied with the quota. Rules should have been established guaranteeing compliance with the quota not only regarding the numbers of women candidates but also the ranking of women candidates on electoral lists.

The lesson learned from the campaign was that it was not sufficient to modify only laws because unless there is the political will to challenge embedded cultural practices, these reforms will be ignored. Moreover, it should ensure that the civil society organizations and their alliances include the goal of women's equal representation, as one of the interviewees said that mixed organizations that did not have women's rights focus actually would work for other interests.

### **B. Mobilizing Voters and lobbying Candidates**

When electoral reform was introduced in Honduras, there was a policy to consider women candidates as political leaders for Congress. The main strategies were raising awareness to the public for new electoral reforms and encouraging and lobbying male and female candidates to include women's voices and women's issues in their election platforms (Oxfam, 2009, p. 83).

A partner organization, *Visitación Padilla*, educated women for voter education and mobilized them to vote for women candidates through facilitated voter workshops for rural women set to coordinate between rural poor women and women candidates to raise their issues (Oxfam, 2009, p. 84). Another group, *Centro de Estudios de la Mujer Honduras (CEM-H)*, lobbied candidates to adopt progressive, women's rights-based agendas and encouraged women and voters, to consider supporting them. This campaign challenged not only cultural and social stereotypes but also invited women to vote for Congressional candidates who had a proposal on women issues.

CEMH visited individual candidates to raise awareness of women's rights and women's issues and also to organize a public forum to raise women's voices. Women were trained to talk in the forum. The campaign's achievement was the first time women run the public consultation in Honduras. Through this campaign, women gained increased knowledge about the political system and legislative reform, and people increasingly came to recognize women candidates as an election alternative (Oxfam, 2009, p. 84).

In the November 2005 general elections, the outcome was a significant increase for women candidates as 31 out of 170 women were elected as full members and 27 as alternate members. This improvement was a significant achievement from seven percent (2001) of Congressional members to 24.2 percent. There was less success at the local level, where only 23 women were elected as mayors out of 298 municipalities (7.7 percent), or fewer than the number elected in 2001 (Oxfam, 2009, p. 85).

### **C. The Political Empowerment of Women with Economic Hardship**

Oxfam worked with two partner organizations for the political empowerment of poor women in target areas. One important set of activities was to work with female indigenous farmers (one of the most marginalized groups in Honduran society) to provide training, and to offer training to civil society and community leaders (Oxfam, 2009, p. 88).

After the training, the women farmers stated that they felt stronger and better able to communicate their needs and interests to different key

actors. According to the authors, “they now recognized the importance of trying to influence decision-making processes that affected their lives and had a better sense of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and of the important contribution that they make to the economy. Increased understanding of how local- and national-level policies are formulated and implemented meant that the women now felt they were in a much better position to influence these processes” (Oxfam, 2009, p. 89).

#### **D. Fewer Number of Women in Congress**

After the 2005 general elections, it was clear that changes to legislation continued to come from the economic elite and conservative religious groups, as they had the economic resources for campaigning and access to the political networks. In contrast, many of the progressive women candidates with whom the partner organization worked did not have sufficient financial backing or the full backing of the political parties to which they were allied.

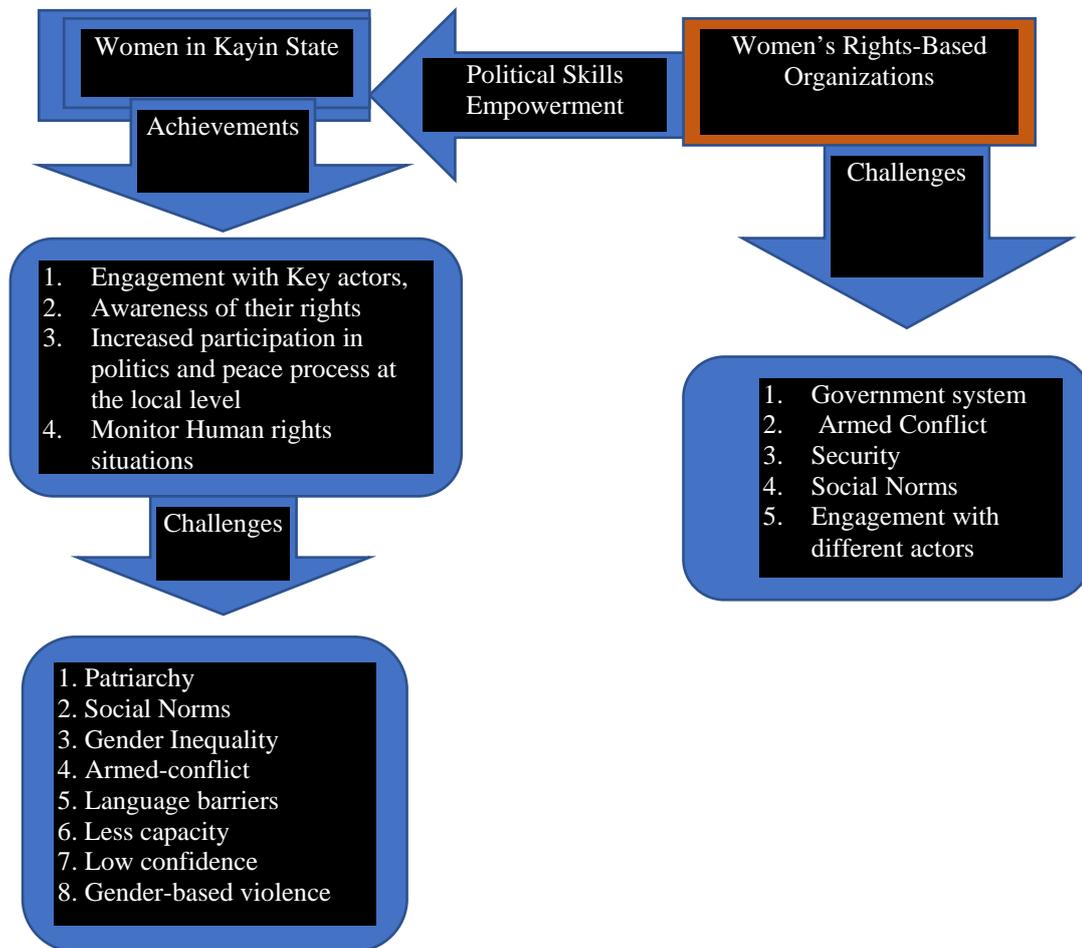
In many cases, women candidates were not selected at all, as parties failed to implement the 30 percent quota. However, in a promising recent sign, an alliance of women in Congress, women actively participated in political parties and women’s organizations were able to convince one of the most conservative parties to propose a reform to the Electoral Law that would raise the quota to 50 percent. However, a problem that women face was that the election of women from conservative and religious backgrounds presented a continued threat to overall women’s rights, given that the groups to which they are allied are promoting public policies that go against civic freedoms and reproducing stereotypes that maintain gender inequality (Oxfam, 2009, p. 86).

Another critical challenge identified was that encouraging poorer women to participate in politics as candidates as announcing candidacy for an election is difficult in a social context where most women have minimal experience of political processes, no or limited access to resources, and little education or are illiterate. The program saw the limited impact from activities such as lobbying parties to include poorer women on electoral lists, and providing training in public speaking and campaigning to women candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds (Oxfam, 2009, p. 86).

The lack of economic and strategic resources of poor women to stand for election must be addressed as well as the challenges due to discrimination and marginalization. The program found that it will take many years of deliberate and systematic effort to change attitudes and beliefs so that poor women standing for election have the support they need from families, communities, and political parties (Oxfam, 2009, p. 86). Successes from this work include policies to increase women's participation that have been implemented in six municipalities where Oxfam is working. Because of this achievement, female local officials have been able to participate in essential activities such as budget design, leading to the allocation of resources for projects that directly benefit women at the local level (Oxfam, 2009, pp. 88).

## **2.7 Concept Analysis Framework**

This figure shows how women's rights-based organizations empowered women for political skills and women's experiences to apply political skills at the local-level of Kayin State.



**Figure 2.1** Concept Analysis Framework

This conceptual framework for this research consists of three parts. The first one argues on the importance of women's rights -based organizations' program on women's political skills empowerment in the conflict area of Kayin state, Myanmar. The second one is how women's rights-based organizations have played a vital role to accomplish women's political skills empowerment. The third one is how women engage and apply their skills in their societies.

## **2.8 Literature Gap**

Although there have been significant numbers of organizations at the national and international-level, women still lack educational and financial resources and are less likely to be candidates up for election. The specific literature regarding the women from community accessing legal aid for human rights violations, especially in sexual and gender-based violence cases, engagement with key actors, women's peace, and security are severely lacking

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Methodology**

This research mainly focuses on the qualitative approach to represent the data gathered from the interviews using a semi-structured method. The research focuses on the practices and experiences of women's rights-based organizations and trained women leaders in Kayin State. Interviews layout the experiences and understanding of those interviewed; therefore, the data is relying on interviews of women's rights-based organizations and trained women. The interviews aim to understand the experiences of women's rights-based organizations, local CSO, NGOs, and trained women.

Qualitative interviews have the advantages of being able to receive the primary data as well as providing the opportunity to follow them up. The strength of semi-structured dialogue interviews is that the key informants and trained women can elaborate their answers based on their perspectives and experiences. The research design is narrative to show the experiences of women's rights-based organizations and trained women.

##### **3.1.1 Documentary Research and Analysis**

By using the qualitative method, the researcher understood more on women's rights-based organizations' program on women's political skills empowerment. The benefits of the qualitative research were able to meet with the trained women, women's rights-based organizations, and local CSO in the field areas, to allow the researcher's receiving the first-hand data for this research.

Each of the women's rights-based organizations projects has different approaches and outcomes so that this research can access the success of the projects based on the framework of the individual project. Moreover, this study shows the barriers that the organizations face for women's political skills empowerment. In this

study, the researcher reviewed the existing research and reports for sources of secondary data.

### **3.1.2 Semi-Structured, In-depth Interview**

The interviews were conducted with seven representatives from women's rights-based organizations, other local CSOs and INGOs, and seven trained women leaders from seven townships of Kayin State. The semi-structured, in-depth interview allowed discussion of women's issues as well as to identify unexpected outcomes and impacts of the work. Each project implemented by the different organizations varies, and they each measured success differently. The semi-structured interview allowed the organizations to identify the successes and the challenges that they have faced.

## **3.2 Sampling Procedure**

### **3.2.1 Respondents**

According to the MIMU (2017), 98 organizations are working in different areas of Kayin State, Myanmar. The research selected seven respondents from six organizations which explicitly work in the area of women's issues, networking, and advocacy. This research chose the seven women representatives' leaders from seven townships who are assisting the legal process to the communities. The four women MPs out of six MPs were chosen for a secondary research to learn the women's leadership of the political changes after 2015. CSO networks are a forum for local-level political participation. In addition; this research highlighted the result of how the 2015 NCA and general elections have improved women's political skills empowerment.

### **3.2.2 Selection Criteria**

The research site focuses on Kayin State, Myanmar. The chosen experts and trained women are the key person in regional for women's empowerment.

## 1) Key Informant Interview

- Women's rights-based organizations and other local CSOs, and INGOs
- Trained women leaders from seven townships of Kayin State

For selecting trained women, the researcher has coordinated with the Women's Organization Network (Kayin) choosing participants fairly and ethically. For fairness, the researcher considered gender inclusions which included; trained women from the most conflict-affected area, and minority ethnic trained women (such as Muslim, Shan, Mon or Pa O) in the Kayin State of Myanmar.

**Table 3.1** Table of Respondents

No: of Respondent	Organization/ Township	Position
1 (A)	Hlaing Bwe Township	Women Leader
2 (B)	Hpa-an Township	Women Leader
3 (C)	Thandaunggyi Township	Women Leader
4 (D)	Kyarinseikkyi Township	Women leader
5 (E)	Kawkareit Township	Women Leader
6 (F)	Hpapun Township	Women Leader
7 (G)	Myawaddy Township	Women leader
8 (H)	WON	Staff
9 (I)	WON	Staff
10 (J)	KWEG	Staff
11 (K)	KWO	Staff
12 (L)	KSCN	Staff
13 (M)	LRC	Staff
14 (N)	MEDA	Staff

### **3.3 Place of Interview**

The researcher chose a community meeting place from Hpa-an city for the interviews. Culturally, Karen women are reluctant to disclose information to unknown people; thus, the researcher visited the training to build a rapport with them when the organization conducted training.

### **3.4 Interview Methodology**

The researcher built a good rapport with the women leaders when the WON (Kayin) conducted the training during the field research. The researcher informed the interviewees about the objectives of the research, explained that the participation was voluntary, and informed participants to stay anonymous if they did not wish to be identified. All interview questions are prepared with the Myanmar language. The researcher used the Myanmar (Burmese) language to interview participants; but for some cases, the interviewer translated the scripts from Karen to English when the women answered with Karen language.

### **3.5 Time Frame**

The thesis proposal was written in December 2018, and the thesis proposal defense was held on January 2019 in Mahidol University, Thailand. The research was approved on 1 April 2019, and the field data collection started in April and finished in May 2019. The transcript for interview translation was finished in May, and the analysis was inserted in thesis in May and June 2019. The thesis defense was conducted on 16 July 2019 at Kathmandu School of Law, Nepal.

### **3.6 Data Analysis Procedures**

The researcher has conducted the five steps of a process of observing, collecting data, documenting of the data, categorizing the data, and interpreting the data into concepts, as well as connecting the data to show how one concept may

influence another and representing the findings. During the process, the researcher analyzed the data systematically from the interviewees. This study is mostly presented in the form of texts, describing or recollecting people's actions. Both the interview data and secondary data were analyzed from the rights perspective by focusing on women's political skills empowerment. The research approach is in the Narrative format.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

The researcher made sure full informed consent and an understanding of a policy of confidentiality before conducting interviews. The researcher has explained the objectives of the research to the interviewees and explained to them that answering any questions was voluntary. Mutual consent was understood and agreed before the conduct of the interviews, and the researcher has ensured that data was kept confidential. The researcher informed every interviewee to replace their names with the respondent number, and most organizations agreed using their organizations' name. Therefore, during the field research, the researcher followed the research principles that followed ethical principles and informed consent before the data collection; the researcher also ensured the privacy and protected the rights to privacy for the interviewees.

### **3.8 Limitations of Research**

The main limitation of the research was the language barriers when the researcher used Myanmar language for interviews; therefore, it took more time to explain the questions to understand. Another barrier is the time constraints for research, data collection, and thesis completion. The researcher must put an effort to follow up with the organizations for the interview as the experts are dedicated to their projects and having limited time. The last limitation of this research is for interviewees' travel time for interviewees, as they traveled from their communities to the city to participate in the research.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter assesses the extent to which women's rights-based organizations have overcome significant challenges to gain achievement of women's political skills empowerment in Kayin State. The chapter also establishes women's experiences in local-level participation, such as engagement with key actors, decision-making processes, women's leadership, and local-level peace and political participation. The chapter also provides the findings and analysis gathered from the field research. This research focuses on women's political skills empowerment, which aims to engage with local-level key actors, local-level decision-making process, women's leadership, and increasing women's awareness of their rights. The research also focuses on how women overcome the challenges by using political skills in their communities, as these women live in government-controlled areas, KNU's controlled areas, and mixed controlled areas (both government and EAO controlled).

The main argument for the whole analysis is that the trained women leaders from community are aware of their rights and they assist the human rights issues in the communities by engaging with key actors, networking, and communicating with women's organizations for rights violations after the political changes in 2015. However, trained women appear mostly in the grassroots-level and rarely seen to reach the State-level politics because of lack of political education, social and cultural norms, language barriers, gender discriminations, and lack of Government's support on women's political empowerment. Moreover, there are still on-going armed clashes, and political oppression still affects women's political participation as IDPs and refugees. As troubles remain, women from communities still face challenges to participate in local-level political participation and peace process.

## **4.2 Reasons for Low Participation in Local-Level Politics**

Myanmar has been under male domination for many years. All respondents from the research raised the issues of prevalent patriarchal socio-cultural norms and gender discrimination in Myanmar, which present barriers to improving women's political participation and empowerment. Cultural norms expect women to provide all domestic labor and elevate men as leaders and decision-makers both within their families, and at the village, township, state and national level political processes, thus challenging women's political empowerment. Training in political skills is reported to be useful by all respondents to increase awareness and skills and to challenge the firmly held beliefs held by both men and women that present a significant obstacle to the work of women's organizations.

### **4.2.1 Social and Cultural Norms and Gender Discrimination**

#### **A. Social and Cultural Norms**

Male dominated cultural practices in Kayin State, as well as the political processes of the State itself, present barriers to women's participation. The research found that women face social norms such as men's automatically taking on the household leadership, women's taking on domestic labor and childcare, and no decision-making agency at the community level. Women who wish to challenge these standards face the added barrier of a lack of support from family members to participate in politics and decision-making process in the community.

The research also found that most women from communities themselves accept cultural norms and practices that they do not feel bold enough to participate in politics. They do not initiate leadership bids or attempt to participate in the decision-making process. Besides, women face barriers of gender-based violence related to traditional practices; and they struggle for livelihood, with little time left and seemingly no interest in politics and the peace process. The seven women leaders from seven townships in Kayin State surveyed all agreed that social norms are firmly rooted in the community and women must operate under these norms, including traditional practices, patriarchy, and challenges from the armed conflicts.

Respondents raised many examples of socio-cultural norms that challenge women's participation. Respondents raised issues of a lack of community support amidst changes.

Respondent A from Hlaing Bwe Township states the followings.

“Many male villagers always attacked the women leaders when they led the development and rights-awareness project in their communities.”

Men grew up in a society that favours them as household leaders, community leaders, and political leaders that it becomes hard for them to accept women's leadership.

Respondent M expresses such an opinion.

“The communities still did not trust women or still doubted women's ability candidates in politics or Parliament. The communities thought that women could not perform the role of men.”

Respondents often focused on social norms that had practical limitations for women's political participation.

Respondent B from Hpa-an Township said the followings.

“When some women became ‘ten households’ leaders (a local level elected representative in Myanmar), men asked: how women could travel at night to deal with the issues if the issues arise in the community?”

Respondent G from Myawaddy Township states that

“Most women are under the power of cultural norms and patriarchy, such as submitting to their husband, and the idea that there is no need to be educated. Even some women and most parents accept it.”

Respondent H and I noted how hard it is for women to make changes; as they stated that

“The social norms and traditional practices shape women for a long time, so it is hard to change the community’s attitudes. Women must try hard at least ten times more than men to participate in the peace process and politics.”

However, a women leader from Thandaunggyi Township noted that

“While the community looked down on women for leadership, when women work together, the community does not dare to look down” (Respondent C, 2019).

These are the social, cultural norms, and practices that shape women in Kayin State and women face challenges to change the communities' attitudes as norms are rooted in the communities.

### **B. Gender Discrimination**

The research finds that there is overwhelming active patriarchal and gender discrimination in the communities. It is undeniable that only the male household leaders participate in decision-making processes, even though women attend community meetings and men represent the whole village to vote in the 2010 general elections. Women are restricted in their participation only in women’s issues and social activities. It is an evidence of systematic discrimination that there are no women township administrators not only in Kayin State but also across Myanmar (The Asia Foundation and Pan Htee Eain, 2017).

The seven women leaders agreed that the community perspectives on gender equality were slightly improved due to two leading causes: firstly, due to communities’ gaining awareness from the training of women’s

organizations; and secondly, due to the increase in women's participation in the local-level political process after the political changes in 2015.

Some respondents have noted changes in communities. Two respondents (H and J) both say the followings.

“Women from the community have gained women's rights since 2013, but after 2014, women rights-based organizations focused more on gender equality because the community did not become aware of gender equality. Women and men are equally treated in some sectors, such as economics and education; but in politics and the peace process, especially leadership and decision-making roles, men remain more privileged than women. Men take a leadership role in the government sectors and parliament too.”

The research analysis shows that only some educated female elites are active in politics at State level, and the women from communities continue to face gender discrimination, norms that prefer male leadership and challenges of little participation in decision-making processes from the grassroots -level to the state-level.

Respondent C from Thandaunggyi said the following opinion.

“The community always selects men as leaders, and the community has a lack of trust for women.”

The Myawaddy women's leader, Respondent G, argues in the following manner.

“Women and men were less equally treated, and more gender-based violence takes place, such as sexual violence, physical violence, and mental abuse and lack of financial supports to the household.”

Respondent H argues the followings.

“The biggest problem is that women accept the social norms the same as the men. The men also never truly accepted gender equality even though they attended a gender awareness session.”

Respondent M argues to the effect as the followings.

“Gender equality is far away to reach. However, some men from the community started accepting this quota system of participation in the peace process and politics.”

The social norms and gender discrimination are significant barriers for women’s political participation, and also women from the community themselves accept the social norms to hinder them from being leaders; lack of confidence is a drawback for women’s political participation.

#### **4.2.2 Women’s Leadership**

Women face considerable challenges to participate in formal political processes at Village Tract, State, and national levels. These challenges have been outlined earlier, of patriarchal socio-cultural norms, a lack of acceptance of gender equality, and all other present barriers. There has been some improvement at state and national levels since the 2015 general elections and NCA. However, for example, in local-level positions of Village Tract Administrator, women’s participation is now reduced in the most conflict-affected area and only slightly improved in the improving conflict-affected area.

Remarkably, female candidates for the Parliament of Myanmar (13.7 percent) have increased in the 2015 general elections. There have only ever been two women state ministers, both from Kayin State, in 1953 and 2015 general elections. In the 2015 general elections, a female chief minister, a female vice minister and four female MPs from the Upper House and one woman MP from the Lower House of

Parliament were elected in Kayin State (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2018).

The drawbacks of women's leadership in most conflict-affected areas were found during the research and the slight improvement in the least conflict-affected area. These are the examples of women's leadership field situations, mentioned when the field research data was gathered.

Respondent F from Hpapun Township states the followings.

“There were more female village tract administrators during the armed conflicts as men needed to hide in the forest to avoid the military's forced labor before the signing of the NCA, and men took leadership after NCA 2015 in most conflict-affected areas.”

In contrast, Respondent B from Hpa-an Township (the capital city of Kayin State) expresses the following opinion.

“There was only one woman village tract administrator in 2010 election in Hpa-an Township. After the 2015 general elections, four out of 99 VT administrators and the communities chose more ten households and 100 household village head.”

Some respondents also added that

“Before the 2015 NCA, the typical approach for villages in high conflict areas was to elect women Village Tract administrators, as the men had to hide in the forest to avoid the military's capture and torture, forced labor, forced recruitment, and forced recruitment to be guides for the military.. This strategy of choosing female administrators is taken because the communities feel that the military treats female VT administrator nicer than men VT administrators.”

In mixed controller areas (Government and EAOs' administrative), there were two VT administrators, in one VT and one represents the government side, and another one represents EAOs side.

Respondent G from Myawaddy Township (Border of Thailand) gave the following statement on the field situation:

“There are no women VT administrators in our township, and only we can see a few women in ten household leaders and a hundred household village heads. Women face challenges to become VT administrator as men dominate this role for many years.”

Respondent J said:

“Before the NCA, women could engage with and advocate with key actors, especially with EAO leaders, as they were afraid to talk with the government side. After the 2015 election, women were more approached by the NLD Government and less approached by the EAOs after the NCA. According to the research from KWEG, it is a long process to empower women with political skills to be ready for candidacy, so the organization decided to focus on livelihood and knowledge sharing, to begin with, to improve women's economic stability and improve their family life. Now there are many women political candidates in Kayin State who are not well educated in political theory but willing to put themselves forward for elections and have experience in running their businesses and households.”

There are over 20 EAOs in Myanmar, and it is rare to see women's leadership in any EAOs across Myanmar. Significantly, the women's decision making process and empowerment from one big EAO in South-eastern Myanmar was active before the 2015 general elections as a women leader was initiative for the National Ceasefire Agreement. The participation of women in political processes, particularly the peace process, was noteworthy to respondents, even when it is only one woman.

Respondent L noted the following:

“A KNU female secretary was initiated to sign the NCA, and so, significantly, a female leader participated in the decision-making process for the NCA. After the 2015 NCA and elections (EAO side), no women leaders who will continue to be leading for consultation among Karen EAOs, so it has been a drawback for women’s participation in politics and the peace process.”

Moreover, there are around 90 political parties in Myanmar, and mostly 90 percent of their executive members are male. In 2015 general elections, 18 political parties won seats but with only seven women candidates, two female ministers at Union level and two female chief ministers at State/Regional level (Salween Institute and Women’s League of Burma, 2018). The women’s participation in political parties is low, and also women face challenges to be candidates in the political party. Among the political parties, the significant changes were found in the NLD party as women become candidates in parliament. However, at the local party appears the same mindset where men dominated in the party, and rarely women candidates was found.

The four women MPs from the NLD party mention the followings.

A female MP from Thandaunggyi Township from Upper house of Parliament said:

“My father was a leader of the National League of Democracy. I became a member of NLD since before 1990 elections, and I wanted to work for the community, so I competed as a candidate for the NLD to represent Thandaunggyi Township, and I became an MP. I received no specific training before becoming an MP” (Women’s Organization Network of Kayin, 2019).

A female MP from Kyarinseikkyi Township from the Upper House of Parliament said,

“I travelled from Kyarinseikkyi to Hpa-an city by bicycle to look for NLD office in Hpa-an city as my community suffers from conflict and human

rights violations. Finally, I found a small NLD office in the corner of the city, but I did not have money to register as a member. A friend gave me the registration fees, and I could register, and finally, I became an MP representing Kyarinnseikkyi Township” (Women’s Organization Network of Kayin, 2019).

A woman MPs from Hpa-an Township, the capital city from Lower House of Parliament said:

“I have been working with Save the Children around Kayin State, so many civilians know me very well, and they voted for me to become their representative. I have gained the skills from working with NGOs for many years and can apply them to my role as a MP” (Women’s Organization Network of Kayin, 2019).

A woman MP from the Upper House of Union Parliament of Myanmar (the most conflict-affected area) said,

“I have worked with UNDP and other local NGOs since 2008, and I gained skills and knowledge from working with NGOs. Before I became an MP, there was no specific political skill training for the role. Nowadays, women are more empowered to receive political skills training from different organizations” (Women’s Organization Network of Kayin, 2019).

After the 2015 general elections, women’s leadership was improved in parties and governmental sectors. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that women leaders have not received any particular political skills training from the Government (GOM) and political parties.

#### **4.2.3 Engagement with Key Actors**

A principal aim of providing women with political skills training is to encourage and enable them to engage with key actors at the local, state, and national

level. It is a fact that women from Kayin State grow up afraid to engage with key actors in conflict-affected areas. Indeed, it was rare to see women's engagement with key actors from the government side in the most conflict-affected area for community issues before the 2015 NCA.

After the 2015 NCA and training, trained women can negotiate and mediate with key actors, but they still have fears to communicate with key actors as there are many actors active in Kayin State. MWD women leader, Respondent G, argues that

“It is rare to see local women's engagement with key actors for community issues, but that is the improvement on trained women who lead to solving the women's issues in the communities.”

Overall, respondents from the women's organizations felt that the training had led to a notable improvement in women's engagement with key actors.

Respondent A states that:

“Trained women are taking a leading role in giving suggestions regarding the legal process to VT leaders and giving rights awareness to the communities after attending the training after the NCA was signed. Trained Women became the peace monitors in the communities; they build a relationship with the government, military, and EAOs.”

Respondent H believes that

"Engagement with key actors has improved, and trained women are now emboldened to talk with an advocate to the respective key actors after training, but this does not apply to all women from the communities."

Respondent J also mentions that

“At the village level, trained women become bold, active, and accessible to the information and skilful as men. Women are empowered by KWEG to be peace monitors. For Kawkareit Township, KWEG trained peace monitors to undertake documentation of human rights violations, and to negotiate with key actors, so most women monitors can engage, negotiate, and advocate with key actors for human rights violations.”

Respondent M notes the followings.

“There have been significant achievements as a result of political skills training, including that trained women are bolder to talk, to engage with and deal with Government (which they were previously afraid to do), and they take the initiative and are aware of and share their rights. Respondent M also felt that many trained women still have a weakness in communication and political knowledge.”

An area manager from MEDA noted that women farmers, in particular, have been very active and noted significant improvement, stating:

“The trained women farmers are active and able to engage with key actors in different sectors after the training from MEDA after 2015, especially women from Kawkareit and Hlaing Bwe townships. The organizations prepared events for women to engage with the businessman, government departments, and loan department, so they are improved significantly for engaging with key actors” (Respondent P, 2019).

The women’s participation and engagement with key actors were significantly improved after the training and 2015 political changes. There are more women from communities need to be empowered to be engaging with different key actors as many armed groups, military, and government actors are there.

#### **4.2.4 Comparison between the 2010 and 2015 General Elections**

This research is more focusing on women's political skills empowerment and especially engagement with key actors and political skills active at the local level decision-making process and leadership. The result of voting behavior comparison between the 2010 and 2015 general elections is not comprehensively conclusive, but it supports the argument for improved women's political skills empowerment.

Before the NCA and the 2015 general elections, there was a history of politicians being tortured, killed, and imprisoned; thus, women from Kayin State did not dare to participate in politics, even the local-level peace process and politics. Moreover, there is a high level of lack education in politics and lack of access to the information, language barriers, and long-term armed conflicts even though female literacy rate is highly 70.98 percent (Myanmar Census, 2014) in Kayin State. However, the 2015 NCA and the 2015 elections gave hope to women who aimed to participate in the peace process and politics.

All respondents said that fewer women voted in the 2010 elections, and most women were controlled by men and some parties to vote for certain candidates. Even in some villages, only men voted for the whole village in the 2010 elections. The analysis shows that the main reason for the low rate of women's voting is caused by women's unawareness of voting's values and no media updates. From 2013 and onwards, women's organizations, local CSOs, and NGOs gave voter education and gender equality awareness training to spread women's awareness of how to vote and also encouragement by their children.

The Hlaing Bwe women leader states the followings.

“There were no polling stations in 2010 general elections in the ethnic-controlled area and some mixed -controlled areas (the most conflict-affected areas). In the 2015 elections, some polling stations were built, and more women voted in this election” (Respondent A, 2019).

Respondent H also mentions the following information.

“In the 2010 election, the women from Kayin State did not become aware of voter education, and also some women are influenced by some parties to vote for them. After the 2015 NCA, women started to become aware of the politics and got awareness by CSOs and NGOs before 2015 general elections and also were encouraged to vote for the right person by their children who informed them from abroad.”

A Respondent (D) noted the direct impact she was able to have on women’s voter turnout although there was no support from the Government or political parties for this, only through women’s organizations and CSOs. She states:

“Before 2015, women did not vote, and few participated in leadership. Women started giving a vote in my village as of 2015, as I am a voter committee member” (Respondent D, 2019).

The Hpapun women leader, Respondent F, said:

“Regarding the election involvement in 2015 elections, all the women currently living in the area took part but not from a too remote area and KNU’s administrative area. No significant number of women is involved in the peace process because women still face armed clashes, and fewer NGOs and CSO are working in the most conflict-affected areas.”

Respondent J mentions that:

“In the 2010 general elections, women have less voter education, and a few parties organize them, so fewer women were voting in this election. Before 2015 general elections, women organizations and local CSOs conducted voter education training, the party also organized the community and social media influences, and the country is opened to develop the democracy; so more women voted in the 2015 general elections. There were more than 60 villages (Civic Education) were trained by KWEG before the villager vote

in the 2015 election. After the NCA in 2015 and the election, the result of women's leadership in the government side was increased but not from the EAOs. Most women are new to be leaders and did not have many experiences in politics; thus, men still dominant in the decision-making process, especially in the peace process and politics."

Respondent M states the followings.

"Women's role in political participation was not obvious before the 2015 NCA and political changes. After the NCA and the NLD party, the State minister was a woman, and also women were encouraged to participate in the peace process, so women's participation and the decision-making process is a bit improved. Before 2015, the prime minister was male, and when we say women participation, he brought his wife in women affair committee, and they did not have gender mind set before 2015."

Respondent L states that

"There are two parts: KAC trained 90 women (2017-2018) for federalism, but women still need to be empowered in Kayin State as most are not interested in politics. Political parties except for NLD party never give women decision-making process. After 2015, women still need empowerment to engage with key actors."

According to his perspective, the organization needs to improve to train women to participate in politics as women were weak in the peace process and political consultation.

Respondent K mentions the followings.

"One representative (man) votes for the whole village in the mixed controlled area in the 2010 general elections. Some women vote, but they do

not understand how to vote. Some women do not vote, but their names are listed in voting rolls.”

Even though women’s participation from communities in the 2015 general elections was improved, women still need more voter education awareness training for upcoming 2020 elections and also more empowerment for trained women leaders to be candidates in local-level politics and peace process. Upon going through the respondents’ views, the researcher has come up with the key understanding that trained women need to be trained to go next level from grassroots-level political participation into State-level political participation.

#### **4.2.5 Government’s Initiatives**

##### **A. Myanmar’s Implementation of CEDAW**

The government of Myanmar ratified the CEDAW in 1997 with the reservation to Article 29 and the Optional Protocol. By reservation of these two components, the Myanmar government limits the usefulness of CEDAW to be used as complaint mechanisms for the rights violations as the important parts of it remain “reserved.” Myanmar is a dualistic country which ratified international treaties [but did not follow them]. In addition, CEDAW obligations are non-derogable, which means that the GoM may not suspend or limit the rights protected under CEDAW even in times of emergency or violent armed conflict (AGIPP, 2017, p.8-9).

The Government of Myanmar submitted the State CEDAW Reports for the first time in 1999, and the second time which combined a second and third periodic report in 2007. In the third time, the Government combined the fourth and fifth reports in 2015. From CSOs and women’s organization side, the CEDAW Shadow Report was submitted by the Women’s League of Burma in 2000, 2008, and 2016. These shadow report expressed that there were still severe and systematic gender discriminations that the Government fails to recognize, respect, and fulfil (AGIPP, 2017).

The WLB, WON, and GEN submitted the shadow report which covers a wide range of CEDAW Articles and themes which mainly include legislative and policy measures prohibiting discrimination, strengthened institutional

mechanisms to advancing women's rights, measures to addressing structural barriers for women's political participation, amending the ineffective legal frameworks for women's access to justice and to strengthen and support services to GBV survivors as well as strengthening access to health care, education, and justice and more attention on the rural and violence-affected area ( AGIPP, 2017).

Respondent J mentions the followings.

“CEDAW shadow report (2016) was the first report which was sent from within Myanmar with the cooperation of WON, WLB, and GEN. The previous two reports were sent by WLB from the border when the military government reigns.”

The field research reflects that it was not easy to gather information on the rights-violation information from the conflict-affected area for CEDAW shadow report and sent from within Myanmar before 2015 NCA and political changes. The government is also slow in implementing CEDAW across the country as women affairs committee from Government shared CEDAW to communities in Kayin state started in 2018.

### **B. Quotas**

All CEDAW state parties, including Myanmar, agreed to mainstream temporary special measures including quotas for women's participation in public life. The General Recommendation (GR5) on temporary measures issued in 1988 had recommended mainstreaming the quota in education, politics, employment, and the economy. Moreover, gender quotas are the strategy to practice women's rights for decision making, for a fair opportunity for gender-inclusive politics, and peace process (AGIPP, 2017).

Despite Myanmar's stated commitment to CEDAW, the Myanmar government has failed to institute a quota system to increase women's participation in the decision-making process. Concerning peace process, peace actors at the first Union Peace Conference (UPC in January 2016) agreed to enable 30 percent women's participation at different levels of political dialogue in terms of the

framework for political dialogues of Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). However, only seven percent of all female delegates attended the first UPC; around 13 percent of delegates were female delegates attending the second UPC or the 21st Century Pinlong Conference. From the EAOs side, 20.5 percent of their delegates were female (36 women out of a total of 175 delegates). While this demonstrates an improvement following the first UPC, it is still short of a minimum of 30 percent quota (AGIPP, 2017, p. 13).

Respondent I responses that:

"Both women's rights (CEDAW) and human rights awareness was not officially accepted in 2013 even though Government ratified CEDAW in 1997 as human rights is a sensitive topic not only in Kayin State but also all over Myanmar. After 2015, women's organizations can deliver CEDAW training more widely, and The Department of Social Welfare (government) started introducing the CEDAW to the communities in 2018."

The research found that 30 percent quotas of women's participation were weak in mainstreaming women's participation in politics, economics, and development in line with CEDAW.

### **C. The National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW)**

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) was adopted from the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing for state commitments to enhance women's rights. This BPfA is a global policy framework aimed at advancing gender equality, development, and peace. It identifies 12 critical areas. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) reviews the BPfA at five years interval (AGIPP, 2017).

The NSPAW or the ten years strategic plan for women (2013-2022) was established by the Myanmar National Committee for Women Affairs, chaired by the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement (MSWRR) in 2013. The NSPAW is based on CEDAW principles and 12 BPfA priority areas, and it

provides a framework for addressing major issues that women face in Myanmar (AGIPP, 2017).

The NSPAW reflected the five vital areas of BPfA on Women and Emergencies suggesting a reluctance to address human rights directly and violations committed against women in the armed-conflict area and women's role in conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building. Moreover, NSPAW has relevance to WPS agenda which includes Violence Against Women (Theme 4), women and emergencies (Theme 5), women and decision-making (Theme 7), institutional mechanisms (Theme 8), and women and human rights (Theme 9). However, NSPAW has a drawback that after more than two years after its launch, it still has no implementation plan or dedicated budget. Besides, the process of translating policy into tangible action has been slow (AGIPP, 2017).

Respondent H and J state that

“The Women Affair of Myanmar cooperated with the Department of Social welfare to explain about the NSPAW to the Kayin communities twice per year but its implementation as of yet to be true. The Government also supports women in the village, especially in health and in line with NSPAW and provides the 15,000 Myanmar Kyat-supports to pregnant women in Kayin State.”

Respondent M expresses the followings.

“In NSPAW, there is only women development strategy for women's participation in NSPAW but not a quota system of 30 percent of women to be included. There are drafts for women are proposed to be 30 percent of women in political participation since 2014, and also NSPAW was drafted in 2013. The CSOs have to train rights awareness to the women and candidates from a political party and also the government staff. However, the government's initiatives in Kayin State are of yet to be seen.”

All respondents also state that no specific women got training from the Government in line with NSPAW such as peace and security, peace-building, women and emergencies except health, education (ECCD), and vocational training.

#### **D. Women, Peace, and Security United Nations Security Council Resolutions**

The international treaties to United Nations Security Council Resolutions have a direct and indirect impact on Myanmar politics and peace and security process. The eight Women Peace and Security UNSCRs have been expressing their relevance in Myanmar. Section 4 mainly pays attention to accountability mechanisms, including an overview of recent advances in the international WPS policy space.

Also, it comes up with an analysis of CEDAW General Recommendation 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict, and Post-Conflict Situations (GR30) as outlined by the committee of CEDAW through its general recommendation No.30. "The general recommendation covers all applications of the Convention to conflict prevention, international and national armed conflicts, situations of foreign occupation as well as other forms of occupation, and the post-conflict phase. The recommendations also cover the situations of concern such as internal disturbances, protracted and low-intensity civil strife, political strife, ethnic and communal violence, states of emergency and suppression of mass uprisings, war against terrorism and organized crime, that may not necessarily be classified as armed conflicts under international humanitarian law and which result in serious violations of women's rights and are of particular concern to the Committee" (United Nations, 2013). Two sets of indicators were developed in 2010, which are tracking the implementation of all the WPSUNSCR, and the country's monitoring by civil society (AGIPP, 2017). Only two EAOs like the KNU from Kayah State and Chin National Front (CNF) from Chin State have signed the Deed of Commitment for the Prohibition of Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict and towards the elimination of gender discrimination.

In line with UNSCR 2122, women's organizations from Myanmar need more technical assistance and funding from the international community to work more on women's participation in the peace process and politics.

In line with a recommendation from UN Women Global study on the implementation of the UNSCR 1325, women's rights organizations must receive regular briefing and advice (AGIPP, 2017).

According to International Standards Guiding Gender Inclusion in Myanmar's Peace Process Policy Paper No.3, "UNSCR 1325 (2000) focuses on not only women affected by war but also women's role in decision making at all levels and women inclusion and representation. Myanmar peace process has failed to develop policies to ensure main women inclusion in line with UNSCR 1325 Section 2.3. The proposal in Myanmar for a 30 percent quota for women's representatives for political dialogues is a positive step, but several structural and practical barriers remain. The protection and prevention pillars of UNSCR 1325 are relevant to 2015 NCA, but the NCA fails to include all forms of violence against women. It also fails to provide a measure that would secure women's access to justice and prosecute the perpetrators of all forms of violence against women" (AGIPP, 2017).

The Government of Myanmar has developed a draft law on Protection and Prevention of Violence against Women (PoVAW) with the consultation with women's organizations and civil society in line with the international framework. The draft law consists of the definition of rape, consent, marriage, inheritance, divorce with a survivor-centred approach but the provision of this draft may be weakened before its passage (AGIPP, 2017).

UNSCR 1820 shows that sexual violence related to conflicts is war crime against humanity. The several reports of GBV since 1990 states that Myanmar failed to amend the Constitution articles guaranteeing impunity. The NCA's Chapter 3, Article 3(m) also excludes the GBV definition and just generally expressed protection of civilians as well as lack of access to justice mechanisms for survivors (AGIPP, 2017).

The Government of Myanmar signed the Declaration of the Commitment to End Sexual Violence in 2014 to advance women's rights; however, it keeps the practice of continued impunity for wartime sexual violence perpetrated by military personnel as well as lack of transparency in military courts. The March 2015 Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in

Conflict has included a statement on Myanmar condemning on-going sexual violence in Kachin State as well as Northern Shan, Rakhine, and Chin states (AGIPP, 2017).

The Government of Myanmar's initiatives on women's empowerment and commitment to international treaties reflects the field situations of Kayin State, Myanmar. The research found that the Government's initiatives on women empowerment are still weak in line with CEDAW, BPfA, and WPS UNSCRs (AGIPP, 2017).

Respondent M mentions related with UNSCR 1325:

“Most government ministers do not understand women's participation in the peace process in line with UNSCR 1325. According to UNSCR (1325), the Government must pay more attention to women's need who will participate in politics. The 30 percent quota means women's inclusion into politics; the issues of women's peace and security are linked.”

Respondent I, mentions that

“Women's lives also were not secured in the conflict area, and the state government also never mainstreamed policy for assisting women's issues to report the cases in court or police station, such as female assistants for language translation and legal assistance.”

Respondent H states the cooperation between UN Women and Government, EAOs women organizations, and CSOs for WPS UNSCR 1325(Women Peace and Security and Advance for Women) action plans are as follows.

“UNHCR (1325) action plans in Kayin State with UN Women and UN women support technical support and funding for this three-month project. The State, level action plan, was finished in October 2018 and national level discussed in Nay Pyi Daw in May 2019..”

Respondent K states that

“The implementation of the Beijing Declaration for the action plan contained in CEDAW is the state government’s responsibility. The State established the NESPAW based on the Beijing Declaration’s strategy (12 topics) (2013-2022) but did not implement until 2019. The INGOs and NGOs in Myanmar are able to point out the extent to which the Government fails to fulfil; however, the responsibility for implementation rests with the State.”

The research analysis shows that the Government’s initiative on NSAPW and international framework are slow in progress and also lack of fulfilling women’s representing and participation in the peace process in line with WPS UNSCR. The Government must allocate funding, technical experts for the department, which were the responsibility for implementing for NSPAW. The Government of Myanmar must ensure the National law on Protection and Prevention of Violence against Women (PoVAW) legislation address recommendations outlined in CEDAW GR30.

### **4.3 Women’s Experiences of Applying Political Skills**

#### **4.3.1 Achievement**

The on-going conflict in Myanmar has affected women’s empowerment and development even though the 2015 NCA was signed. The women from communities have been aware of the women’s rights since 2013, but women were not active to raise awareness and their rights even the women faced a lot of human rights violations. In 2015 NCA and general elections, the gender equality was introduced to the community, CEDAW, NSPAW, and 30 percent women quota information was brought to the community by the women’s organizations, and the Government and EAOs more aware to mainstream 30 percent women quota.

Before 2015 political changes, the local CSOs and women organizations found hardship to share the UDHR and women rights awareness. The local CSOs and some women organizations were found unregistered organizations even though the organizations worked for the right awareness, and it was hard to register before 2015.

Most women leaders who are local implementers are trained to be peace monitors, and they volunteer to the community and to give updates and monitor the human rights situations. The Trained Women leaders are also paralegals to assist legal supports to the communities in Kayin State. The research found that as many young women leave Kayin to work in Thailand to the extent that their political participation is weak. The trained women leaders from seven townships confirmed that they had not received any political training from governments and political parties; instead, the community received health and vocational training from the Government.

The success stories of women's leadership were gathered from seven townships in Kayin State:

A women's leader from Hlaing Bwe Township stated the followings.

"She had feared to participate in politics because she lives in the conflict area, and the armed clashes took place before the bilateral ceasefire agreement (2012). She has had experiences of struggling in life during the armed conflicts before 2012, including enduring an armed clash between the state military (Tatmadaw) and the KNU in her village. From this experience, she wanted to learn more about the peace process and politics to understand the conflict and take action to prevent further suffering. She received training from some women's rights-based organizations, and she became a peace monitor in 2015" (Respondent A, 2019).

Respondent A also mentions the following information.

"A trained women leader from Hlaing Bwe Township who got training from a women's rights-based CSO gave the legal assistance to the VT administrator and the whole village. Now she always helps with legal consultation for criminal cases and domestic violence cases. Her family

supported her to participate in politics, community meetings, and training. She delivered the child rights training, and the child abuse (beating children at schools) is reported in the meetings by parents, and the issues go up to the township education management. Then her family members prohibited her not to participate in politics and community. Even though she faced challenges, she continued to assist the community for the legal process.”

Respondent C mentions the followings.

“After they received training, they shared women’s rights awareness to the women in the communities. At the same time, they established a women group in 13 miles, Thangaungyi Township in 2018, and the women group assist with the women’s issues and also engage with key actors and participate in local-level peace consultation.”

A respondent B from Hpa-an Township states that

"She has been working as a women’s leader and ten-household leader for over ten years. The critical problems that she has had to deal with were road accidents and some community’s issues. The villagers gave respect to her as she always takes the initiative for social and community issues. She also mentions that a female ten-household leader used negotiating skills and leadership skills to solve some issues in the communities after she was chosen in the 2015 general elections."

A women leader, Respondent D from Kyarinseikkyi Township said the followings.

“Women from the community started aware of participating in social, political, economic, environmental, and peace and security. Women from grassroots level are improved at engaging with the VT administrator, KNU leaders, and religious leaders, but they are still weak in building a

relationship with the township level government as it is the most conflict-affected area. They cooperate with key actors for the primary protection of women and children and also participate in the local-level peace process. Trained Women also trains women from the community for rights awareness, and most are active to learn about rights awareness, but some women are not interested to learn rights awareness. She has been working as a peace monitor since 2017, and she works more on the civilian rights and reports the human rights violation cases and shares the peace process information to the women in communities.

Respondent E from Kawkaireit Township reports how she was chosen as a women's leader in the women's group in her village since 2008.

“She is the peace monitor, paralegal, and also a sale promoter on behalf of women farmers in her Township. After she received political skills training, she shared her knowledge to every woman in the community. From the training onwards, women have been good at engaging with key actors and every project that always works with them in her Township. The women's group in her community has gained notoriety as a role model village in her Township, and she has become the president of women's affairs committee and also one of the communities' development-driven projects. Respondent E also mentions that a trained young woman who was trained by her also delivers gender equality and rights awareness training in many communities in Kawkaireit Township. Now women know protection, legal awareness, rights awareness after they attend training through her” (Respondent E, 2019).

A women leader, Respondent G from Myawaddy Township expresses this opinion.

“Many women's behaviour changes after they receive training. Women gain the skills and knowledge of gender-based violence, women rights, and legal

awareness. The significance is that one woman's behaviours change after she attended training. She starts reading more, expanding her knowledge, and expressing her opinions. So it is very significant changes to see that the political skills training changes women who accept traditional norms and promote their leadership skills" (Respondent G, 2019).

The women leader, Respondent F from Hpapun Township (the most conflict-affected area), reported:

"The trained women give legal assistance to women's issues and also coordinate with key actors for women's issues. Moreover, trained women have collaborated with women's organizations to handle women's issues" (Respondent F, 2019).

The research found that trained women leaders from the community are aware of their rights and improving their engagement with key actors and participation in dealing with women's issues. The analysis found that women from the community are good at engaging with EAOs as the EAOs-administered areas (and some mixed-controlled area), but the women from the community are still weak in engaging with the Government. Trained women leaders are peace monitors, paralegals, and sale promoters for giving legal assistance to the community with the cooperation of women's network, but trained women leaders are yet in the position of becoming candidates in State-level parliament because of low capacity and other barriers although they participate in the local-level peace process and political dialogues.

#### **4.3.2 Challenges**

The seven women leaders state that women from the community still face harassment, sexual violence, gender inequality, and gender discrimination in the communities of Kayin State in Myanmar. Even though most women are aware of their rights and improve in engaging with key actors, the women leaders admit that the local women are less educated to reach politics for attachment to domestic duties and lack of confidence to participate in politics.

Significantly, the women leaders assert that women from community crucially underestimate themselves. When they attend a meeting for the local-level peace process, politics consultation, and community meeting, women are attending but are silent for discussion and public speaking. More women from the most conflict-affected area do not have the confidence to engage with key actors, especially with Government as they grew up with the trauma of the conflict for several decades.

A women leader, Respondent A from Hlaing Bwe Township, said the followings.

“She faces challenges when she assists in community management and legal process in her village. Many villagers attack the women’s leader because they are female, and the male villagers do not like the women leading them. The most challenging part is to invest most of their time for villagers to be aware of human rights, gender concepts, and development; even the women leaders’ mothers do not like to participate. Another challenge is to build a relationship with the military, Government, and EAOs as a peace monitor. The women leader mentions that if she cannot build a relationship with the key actors, it is hard to discuss the rights violations issues in a meeting. Another challenge is to inform the authority to conduct training for rights awareness, and sometimes the authority does not allow rights-awareness training to be conducted. In the conflict time, women have to deal with these issues themselves as their husbands leave the communities to hide from the military. Women have a mindset of never giving up. It is challenging to organize women to participate in politics as they have to deal with their livelihood and take care of the family.”

A women leader from Hpa-an Township argues in such mannerism.

“Women need to be advanced and more active to do community management. The biggest challenge that they face is to deal with the issues of the government’s legal system that some clients do not like the government’s legal system as it is too long as a process” (Respondent B, 2019).

A women leader from Kyarinseikkyi Township argues that

“Women from communities are lacking in interest in politics and attendance in the rights awareness training as they are struggling for economics (Respondent D, 2019).

A women leader, respondent from KKR Township, recalls that

“When she worked as a peace monitor, armed clashes took place in her village in 2015. One woman was severely injured during the event, and she informed the women’s rights-based organization. When there was a lull in the fighting, they were able to save her life by sending her to the hospital. The biggest challenges that she faced in the village were to invest and commit her time for the next women leaders to rise” (Respondent E, 2019).

A women leader, Respondent G from Myawaddy Township, says that

“Women from the community face extreme social issues if they attend training, such as being doubted of committing adultery by community or family members. Women from communities need to be empowered to understand how to raise the rights as trained women so the women from the community can solve the problems with trained women for standing to fight the gossip and wrong perception on trained women. Women are still struggling to participate in the local-level peace process and politics” (Respondent G, 2019).

Respondent F from Hpapun Township said that

“The Hpapun area is the most conflict-affected and even conducting rights awareness training is not as easy as the community members live in an environment between multiple ethnic armed groups and the military. Therefore, it is challenging to communicate the meaning of the training and

how important it is for the women to take part. Women still lack leadership skills and need more capacity to handle domestic violence cases.”

Women from community struggle for livelihood, social norms, and armed conflicts. Most women from the community are found to have little interest in politics and peace process as they have been under armed conflict for many years. Language barriers hinder them from accessing political information, and the low capacity stops them to be involved in politics. The trained women leaders and organizations also face challenges of social norms and women to be aware of their rights and also giving legal assistance. Moreover, trained women leaders also found hardship in engaging with key actors for rights violations issues. The research also found that trained women leaders have low capacity to go to the next level of candidacy in State-level even though they are good as Township-level leaders.

## **4.4 Organizations’ Experiences**

### **4.4.1 Achievements**

Trained women leaders who are aware of rights can give legal assistance to the people to the community. A woman leader is trained to be a paralegal in the community and to document the issues related to GBV and human rights abuses in the community. Most trained Women leaders are good at communication with women organizations for the issues that arise. Trained women leaders give priority to the community human rights abuses, and the VT administrator has a role to a consultation that they take a role in the leadership and decision-making for women’s issues happening in the community. The trained women leaders also give suggestions to VT leaders for the legal process if needed.

Respondent H mentions the following opinion.

“Women are improved in giving legal assistance, and also some selected women from Thandaungyi Township attended a peace dialogue” (Respondent H, 2019).

Respondent J also states that

“Trained women leaders become active and bold and can make decisions, and are also good at engaging with key actors directly. The trained women themselves become key actors to give legal awareness, and the communities have to consult with them for a legal process. The trained women participate in local-level peace consultations. The trained women leaders know the complaint mechanism and referral system. KWEG has been training women as peace monitors in the communities to do human rights violations documentation, negotiation, and mediation. Most women peace monitors from Kawkareit Township can engage, negotiate, and advocate with key actors for human rights violations.”

The women organizations have become established and become a network of WON (Kayin). Now women leaders can lead and contribute to the decision-making process regarding the women issues in the communities. However, it is only a few trained women leaders and not all women from communities yet.

From LRC, Respondent M states that:

"Women's participation and local-level decision-making have improved, but women have less of a role in the decision-making process as men still take leadership at every level of politics. We CSOs have to train the women and candidates in the political parties and also government staff. Women leaders have improved in their ability to engage with key actors, such as complaining about the issues directly to the Government ministers. The potential four women candidates' family fully supported them to be leaders to attend training regularly to become MPs in the 2020 general elections.

Women can participate in peaceful dialogue and deliver peace awareness training to the communities."

A respondent K from the KWO expresses that their organization stands for human rights, and the community from Kayin State and the world acknowledge them. A respondent from KWO testifies that

"She grew up in a Karen village amid constant conflict and felt there was no future for her. She started working for the communities by studying hard, and she attended women's leadership/women's empowerment course at the intermediate level of KWO. Later she became a member of the KWO and a general secretary of the Women's League of Burma" (Respondent K, 2019).

MEDA implements projects for women farmers' empowerment in Kayin and Shan State after the 2015 NCA and general election. A program manager states that

"Women leaders from Kayin state receive gender awareness and women leadership training to promote businesswomen to participate in the national economy and to participate in the decision-making process. After they receive training, trained women have to share with their women's group. Now women leaders become the sale promoters, sale representatives, and are effective at engaging with different key actors. Some trained women, especially women from Kawkaireit and Hlaing Bwe townships, take the initiative and are good at leadership, so they are chosen to be a VT administrator, hundred household head, and ten household leaders" (Respondent N, 2019).

MEDA shared one success story is as the followings.

"A women leader from Tharmanya, Kawkaireit Township is outstanding and good at engaging with key actors until union level. She is a leader and also a

merchant. At the beginning of the project, she wanted to leave from the women's group as she had more challenges as a women leader in the village. When she did plantation with different techniques, so the villagers, especially men, underestimate the technology that she used, but she never gave up for modern technology and later, so she showed with the witness of harvesting. Later on, many villagers including men accepted her as a women leader in her village, and now she becomes the township sale promoter on behalf of all women farmers in her Township" (Respondent N, 2019).

#### **4.4.2 Challenges**

Most women's rights-based organizations mention that the CSOs and NGOs face challenges today engaging with key actors, as three key actors—the Government, Army, and EAOs—are present in the conflict area. The government system is also the same process even though the civilian government reigns as the governing body and the same people are still sitting at the table. Some CSOs argue that they have challenges to build trust with the EAOs as well; most local CSOs need to approach some religious leaders before 2015 to implement the activities. Some women's rights-based CSOs argue that the women's rights-based organizations are encouraged to work more for women's capacity by the Prime Minister after 2015 but still have challenges to implement the women's activities at the ground level as the village authority are not under the government body. Most women's rights-based organizations and local CSOs argue that women from the community lack capacity in politics, lack of confidence to participate in politics and to be candidates in politics but not all set for trained women leaders. Some organizations argue that some women are educated, but they have less experience in politics than that of men, so they have to put in more effort to meet the expectation. Even though women are aware of their rights to participate in politics, women are not interested in political participation because the political oppression was a huge overwhelming since the previous time and social norms and communities are not encouraged to resist.

Most young women are educated, but they are not interested in politics and are not willing to study politics and the peace process as they are overwhelmed by others' popularity. Compared to Thailand (6%) and Malaysia (10.45), data on

Myanmar women candidates showed improvement in the 2015 general elections (The Asia Foundation and Pan Htee Eain, 2017).

The Local CSOs, Respondent L, suggested this opinion.

“Women need more capacity building and coaching to be in politics as they are also weak in studying policy and legal issues and accessing political knowledge. The challenges of women also include, of course, their being trapped in poverty and struggling for economic and house chores.”

Respondent H states that

“They face challenges on the government’s system approval to conduct training. For example, the organization already submitted the informed letter for implementation to the DSW and the prime minister, but the local authority did not approve the implementation especially in the conflict-affected area and recommended that WON contact the Prime Minister for permission.”

Respondent I, argues that

“They have faced challenges with harassment in dealing on rights and justice for the villagers and have had to deal with several actors participating in the case and sometimes it is hard to deal with perpetrators.”

Respondent J argues that:

“It is still challenging to implement the activities after the NCA as the information letter should go to the EAO leaders, government department, and also the military. The government administration mechanism is the same as the old system, and before 2015, it is easy for us to submit the informed letter for implementation only to the military government and EAOs. After 2015, For example, some improvement was seen in the

government department as the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) was more cooperation with local CSOs. Even though the Government uses the old administration mechanism, some government departments are much easier to work with, and they have been more willing to help us after the 2015 general elections."

Respondent L expresses that

"Those women's rights-based organizations and CSOs are still weak in mentoring women to participate in politics, and to be able to discuss in the peace consultation and political dialogue. Women still lack confidence and are weak in knowledge and skills to participate in politics. Women face gender inequality and gender discrimination in the local party, especially in the decision-making process except for NLD party."

Respondent K states that

"Local women face challenges of the language barrier to reach politics as all women are ethnic and cannot speak Burmese as most information is in the Burmese language. Another challenge has been the harassment of security issues from the opponents, especially from domestic violence cases."

A Respondent N from MEDA argues that:

"Women faced challenges when women gained skills more than before. Other challenges are that women face taboos and harassment in their communities."

This research finds that although since the NCA and 2015 general elections, women's participation at the local-level in Kayin State has improved, significant barriers remain that perpetuate socio-cultural norms and gender discrimination.

The research analysis shows that the only some women's rights-based organizations are initiating for training women to be candidates in State-level parliament for 2020, but other women's rights-based organizations only focus on grassroots-level women's leadership, so it is rare to see the trained women become representatives in the parliament. Some trained women were found as VT administration, paralegals, peace monitors and sale promoters at local-level of Kayin State.

The analysis shows that the Government has not started any political skills training to women across Myanmar, and most political parties are also weak in mainstreaming women participation in politics. The women's rights organizations also need more capacity building to rise up the women from the grassroots level to State-level political and decision-making process. The Government also needs to ensure the policy or existing law to protect women's security to participate in politics in line with CEDAW.

The women's organization and local CSO, INGOs achieved to raise the women leaders from communities in Kayin state for assisting human rights violation issues in communities and also to promote the local economy and women's leadership in local-level politics. The trained women leaders are also helping the communities to aware rights and trained the women from community to raise the issues related with rights violations even though trained women leaders and organizations face challenges of harassment, dealing with several key actors for rights violated issues, gender exclusion, and patriarchy and socio-cultural norms that rooted in the government system and communities.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

Ethnic minorities in Myanmar have faced decades of political oppression, armed conflict, human rights violations, and economic crisis. Kayin (Karen) State has been affected by prolonged conflicts for more than 70 years, and women have been affected by particular human rights violations related to conflicts. The instability in regime, security, and infrastructure has meant that women have limited capability to report violence or harassment and simultaneously have no faith in the establishment to act.

In 2015, the dominant Karen ethnic armed organizations became the signatory to the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), and later that year a civilian government was elected. These changes have led many civilians to hope for improvements to the development of Myanmar economically, socially, and particularly in regards to human rights and access to justice. The rise to the office of Daw Aung San Su Kyi was considered a historic moment in the campaign to improve women's rights across the country.

The objective of this thesis is to learn more about women's experiences in political skills empowerment and to measure the impact of training mainly led by women's rights-based organizations in Myanmar. The study evaluates how women's rights-based organizations played an essential role in women's political skills empowerment development. The study also focuses on the extent to which women were engaged and, therefore, participated in the political process relating to voting, leadership, and engagement with key actors, education, and challenging societal and gender-based norms. The research uses in-depth interview methodology, gathering information from twenty-one informants from women representatives, organizations, and governmental institutions.

Many interviewees felt that women's participation in voting, politics, and local level peace processes were improved after 2015 NCA and the general elections many focusing on the impact on marginalized groups. In additions, the interviewees

felt that domestic violence and human rights violations cases are less common than before 2015, attributing this to communities' increased awareness of women's rights, led mainly by the CSOs that have become more prevalent in Kayin State since 2012.

The research found that as a result of the training, women feel more equipped to participate in the decision-making process in communities, and take action when it comes to human rights violations. However, the respondents are still participating in areas focus on women, and they do not necessarily feel equipped to branch out into areas typically dominated by men. In addition, while the respondents note improvements in women participation in politics, at the local level political and peace processes, females running for leadership positions at the village or township level have considerable risks attached to it. As women generally are the primary caregivers and housekeepers with little control over their finances, running for a leadership position is very rare. However trained women leaders are still becoming paralegals, and peace monitors, and also women groups are being formed to assist in the legal process regarding human rights violations, working with active women networking groups and lawyers.

The key challenges facing women's empowerment in Myanmar are found at the top and grassroots levels. In their mission to train and empower women to be active citizens, women's rights organizations face challenges rooted deep within the government system and key government authorities, such as the military, government departments, EAOs, and VT administrators. This research found that even if the women's rights organizations overcome the barriers put in place by the government authorities, they face further challenges in the other social power structures of religion and economy, and the lasting effects that they have on women's perception of their capacity, skills, and confidence. Continuous armed conflict and language barriers also were significant issues in these projects.

The research found that low numbers of women's involvement in leadership and involvement in decision making in communities are due to limited opportunity for women, as men are traditionally seen as the default decision-makers. It is undeniable that women's leadership and women's administration have remained low in the most conflict-affected areas after the 2015 elections and NCA because, despite these landmark changes, the cultural attitudes will not be changed in the long term

without a sustainable education initiative that is implemented by a responsible and progressive state authority.

This research recommends on-going and sustainable political skills training and mentoring for women across Myanmar, and advocacy against gender discrimination not only in the government and grassroots level but also spanning national organizations such as EAOs, CSOs, and religious groups. If the authority within every type of power structure in Myanmar continues to reside with men, the change will never be happening. The Government begins with establishing laws and policy to provide at least thirty percent of positions reserved to women within the political and peace process. The Government should also renew their commitment to the international treaties that they have signed, with particular emphasis on CEDAW. The empowerment and participation of women is the key to development. Effectively taking half of the population out of the decision-making process is a way to make sure a country is left behind as the world progresses, and the women and men of Myanmar deserve a new chance at hope.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **LIST OF RESPONDENTS**

- Hlaing Bwe Township Representative Women Leader (2019), Interview in Person, Veranda Café Meeting Room, Hpa-an City, 10 April 2019.
- Hpa-An Township Representative Women Leader (2019), Interview in Person, Veranda Café Meeting Room, Hpa-an City, 9 April 2019.
- Hpapun Township Representative Women Leader (2019), Interview in Person, Aden Hall, Hpa-an City, 12 May 2019.
- Karen Civil Society Organizations Network– Kayin (2019), Interview in Person, KAC Hpa-an Office, 9 April 2019.
- Karen Women Empowerment Group – Kayin (2019), Interview in Person, KWEG Hpa-an Office, 8 April 2019.
- Karen Women Organization – Kayin (2019), Interview through Phone, 9 May 2019.
- Kawkareit Township Representative Women Leader (2019), Interview in Person, Aden Hall, Hpa-an City, 12 May 2019.
- Kyarinseikkyi Township Representative Women Leader (2019), Interview in Person, Veranda Café Meeting Room, Hpa-an City, 9 April 2019.
- Local Resource Center – Kayin (2019), Interview in Person, Veranda Café Meeting Room, 8 April 2019.
- Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) (2019), Interview in Person, Veranda Café Meeting Room, 6 May 2019.
- Myawaddy Township Representative Women Leader (2019), Interview in Person, Aden Hall, Hpa-an City, 13 May 2019.
- Thandaunggyi Township Representative Women Leader (2019), Interview in Person, Veranda Café Meeting Room, 9 April 2019.
- Women’s Organization Network – Kayin (2019), Interview in Person, Veranda Café Meeting Room, 8 April 2019.
- Women’s Organization Network– Kayin (2019), Interview in Person, Veranda Café Meeting Room, 8 April 2019.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

**QUESTIONS: Trained Women and Women's Rights-Based Organizations, Local CSOs and INGOs**

- 1) How do the societies mostly tell women you hear in your society of Kayin State?
- 2) How do the societies mostly tell men you hear in your society of Kayin State?
- 3) Are women treated fairly like men in your society? If yes, how? If no, Why?
- 4) How many women are village tract leaders or village leaders in Kayin State, Myanmar? How many women are in the Kayin Parliament?
- 5) What are the women's roles (to vote, to lead or to make the decision) in the society of Kayin State before National Ceasefire Agreement (2015) in Kayin State?
- 6) What are the women's roles (to vote, to lead or to make the decision) in the society of Kayin State after National Ceasefire Agreement (2015) in Kayin State?
- 7) What are differences before and after training of Women opportunities to participate in politic (to vote, to lead or make the decision or to engage with key actors) in the conflict area of Kayin State?
- 8) Do you think that women also got political skills training by government and political parties? If yes, what skills and how many times? What are the outcomes?
- 9) Which organizations (CSO, NGOs, and Media) train the women in political skills right now in Karen State? Who are they? How many times? What are the outcomes? Can you share the data?
- 10) What are the significant achievements of skills that women gained from training? 1. by NGOs, CSOs 2. By Government and political parties

11) How do women apply their political skills to engage with key actors in the conflict area of Kayin State?

12) How do women apply their political skills to participate in the peace process or politic in the conflict area of Kayin State?

13) Could you share the success story of communities' acceptance stories (Promote Women Leadership and decision-making process) and family supported stories of the trained women used their political skills to engage with different key actors in their communities?

14) Could you share the success story of communities' acceptance stories (Promote Women Leadership and decision-making process) and family supported story of the trained women used their political skills to participate in the peace process or politic in Kayin State?

15) What are the specific challenges of women face to apply political skills in their communities?

16) How do women overcome those challenges? Could you share the women's success story of challenging?

17) How do women become resilience even though they face challenges in the conflict area of Kayin State?

18) What are the significant challenges of NGOs face to empower women for political skills? How do NGOs overcome those challenges? Could you share any success story of overcoming challenges?

19) Have you involved in CEDAW Shadow report, UPR report? When? How many times? Did you follow up the Government's obligation?

20) Did you know the Beijing Declaration for women participation and platform for action? Could you please share the Security Council Resolution regarding the women participation in protection and peace process?

21) What do women need to improve to participate in politic or to engage with key actors in the conflict area of Kayin State in the future?

## APPENDIX C



English > Human Rights Bodies

### Ratification Status for Myanmar

Treaty	Signature Date	Ratification Date, Accession(a), Succession(d) Date
CAT - Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment		
CAT-OP - Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture		
CCPR - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights		
CCPR-OP2-DP - Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to the abolition of the death penalty		
CED - Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance		
CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women		22 Jul 1997 (a)
CERD - International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination		
CESCR - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	16 Jul 2015	06 Oct 2017
CMW - International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families		
CRC - Convention on the Rights of the Child		15 Jul 1991 (a)
CRC-OP-AC - Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict	28 Sep 2015	
CRC-OP-SC - Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography		16 Jan 2012 (a)
CRPD - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities		07 Dec 2011 (a)

## **BIOGRAPHY**

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<b>QUALIFICATIONS</b>	Bachelor of Accounting (Yangon Institute of Economics, 2002-2005) Post-Graduate Diploma of Business Law (Yangon Law Department, 2014) Organization Development Course (Payah University, 2016) Post Graduate Diploma of Intellectual Property Law (Yangon Law Department, 2018) Master of Human Rights and Democratisation (Mahidol University, 2018- 2019)
<b>WORK EXPERIENCE</b>	Women’s Organization Network (Kayin) (Internship, 2019) ActionAid Myanmar (Program Coordinator - Field Operations, 2017-2018) Karen Human Rights Group (Project Coordinator, 2015-2017) Payah University (Application Project – Entrepreneurship in Kayin State) (Project Manager, 2015-2016) Entrepreneurship Trainer (Build Capacity Building Centre – 2014)