

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN MYANMAR



Photo: Renaud Egretau

Experiences of Women Parliamentarians 2011-2016

Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, Kim N. B. Ninh, Mi Ki Kyaw Myint and Susan Lee
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The Asia Foundation
Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities



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About The Asia Foundation and Phan Tee Eain

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Informed by six decades of experience and deep local expertise, our programs address critical issues affecting Asia in the 21st century—governance and law, economic development, women’s empowerment, environment, and regional cooperation. In addition, our Books for Asia and professional exchanges are among the ways we encourage Asia’s continued development as a peaceful, just, and thriving region of the world. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.

Phan Tee Eain (PTE) was established in 2009 and provided civic and voter education for the 2010 election. PTE has worked to promote gender equality among parliamentarians and political parties by strengthening the leadership capacity and skills of both women candidates and elected women in Myanmar since 2012. PTE published research on women participation in political parties in 2014 and in preparation for the 2015 general election in Myanmar, PTE conducted voter education trainings, voter list awareness campaigns and vote for women campaign. PTE then carried out nationwide election observation on women’s participation in the 2015 general election and documented the findings. PTE is committed to research-based advocacy. Moreover, PTE has been working for women’s development together with other women’s organizations, gender-focused organizations, democratic institutions and networks within the country and region. Currently Phan Tee Eain is an active member of Women’s Organization network (WON) and Gender Equality Network (GEN).
Our Vision: A society that values gender equality and diversity in Myanmar



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Preface

Sixty years of military rule in Myanmar has seen the critical role of women's political participation marginalized. From an extremely low base, the 2010 general elections, which initiated a historic transition from military rule to a civilian-led government with functioning parliaments at both Union and state/region levels, did increase the opportunity for women's participation in governance. The 2015 general elections presented another opportunity for a more inclusive representational government, and Myanmar saw a significant increase in the number of women parliamentarians. However, there remain substantial challenges to addressing the gender gap in political participation in Myanmar, given the deeply entrenched social norms in both men and women regarding the role of leadership women can play in government and in society. Women in decision-making positions, and those aspiring to fulfill such positions have encountered explicit and implicit discrimination in both professional and private spheres, quite different than what their male counterparts would experience.

Given the nascent but evolving context for women's political participation in Myanmar, The Asia Foundation thought that it would be useful to document the experiences of the first generation of women parliamentarians to understand better their motivations and the challenges they face. We hope that the insights that they have about their own situations and what can be improved would be useful for the next generation of women's parliamentarians as well as informing relevant support provided by government, political parties, and civil society organizations to increase gender equality in Myanmar.

As the political and private spheres of Myanmar continue to evolve, the role of women leadership will be needed but will also likely be questioned not only by men but also by women. For all the discrimination they do face from men in the workplace and in society, one of the most poignant findings of the research is that the women parliamentarians felt that the biggest challenge they faced were less from their male counterparts or male voters, but more from women voters themselves who do not support women in political roles. They also often felt insecure and lacking in confidence, even when the data shows that they were as qualified as the men. These are some of the complex dynamics impacting women's political participation and gender equality in Myanmar, but it should also be noted that for many of these women parliamentarians, their unique positions as the first women MPs in Myanmar have transformed their own sense of capacity and commitment to improving the lives of their constituents more specifically and the larger public more broadly. The examples they shared of what they have learned to improve their work and their strategies to achieve results should be useful and inspirational not only to other women MPs but to all MPs who have a unique role to play in the country's democratization process.

The research paper is authored by Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, Kim N. B. Ninh, Mi Ki Kyaw Myint, and Susan Lee. The opinions expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The Asia Foundation.

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Terms and Acronyms

Amyotha Hluttaw	The ‘House of Nationalities’ or the upper house of the National Parliament (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw)
CBO	Community-based organization
CEC	Central executive committee
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CNP	Chin National Party
CSO	Civil society organization
Hluttaw	Parliament
INGO	International non-governmental organizations
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MNCWA	Myanmar National Committee for Women Affairs
MP	Member of Parliament
NDF	National Democratic Force
NLD	National League for Democracy
NSPAW	National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women
PSDP	Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw	The ‘Assembly of the Union,’ the national bicameral legislature of Myanmar, consisting of an upper house (Amyotha Hluttaw), and a lower house (Pyithu Hluttaw.)
Pyithu Hluttaw	The ‘House of Representatives’ or lower house of the National Parliament (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw)
RNDP	Rakhine Nationalities Development Party
Sealed Questions	A term used in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to refer to questions asked by MPs for written responses from government agencies. Also referred to as non-starred questions.
Starred Questions	A term used in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to refer to questions asked by MPs publicly to government agency representatives.
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SNDP	Shan Nationalities Democratic Party
SNLD	Shan Nationalities League for Democracy
Tatmadaw	Myanmar Armed Forces
UDPKS	Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

Executive Summary

Myanmar's stated commitment to women's role in public life is longstanding; women were granted the right to vote in 1935, one of the earliest countries in Asia to do so. Myanmar endorsed the Beijing Declaration in 1995 and became a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1997. The National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women 2013-2022 identified a key priority as ensuring women's equal participation and leadership in governance at all levels of society.

In practice, however, women's ability to take part in Myanmar's political life has been very limited, made even more so by more than 60 years of military rule. This dynamic began to change with the 2010 general elections which marked the historic transition from military rule to civilian government. Members were elected to both a new national bicameral parliament with an upper and lower house and 14 parliaments in the states and regions.

While the military continues to maintain power through the constitutional provision that reserved 25% of parliamentary seats to the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces), the first elected parliaments of 2011-2016 were much more active than anticipated by both international and domestic observers. Elected women made up only 6% of the Union parliament, with four holding seats in the upper house and twenty-four in the lower house. Additionally, only two women members of parliament (MPs) were appointed and represented in the 166-seats reserved for the military in the national parliament (56 seats in the Upper House and 110 seats in the Lower House). Across the 14 state/region parliaments, women only won 25, or 3.8% of the seats.

Women's political participation is also challenged by the policies and practices of the political parties themselves. Myanmar now has more than 90 political parties, but only a handful have concrete policies promoting women's participation or set aside reservations for women candidates. Some 90% of Central Executive Committee members of political parties remain male. The percentage of women holding decision-making positions in state/region and district level party organization structures is around six percent. Women are similarly under-represented in ministerial and deputy ministerial positions as well as in the judiciary. A number of factors have been commonly identified as driving this marginalization, including a lack of experience and skills and embedded cultural norms held by both the broader society but also by women themselves which discourage them from active political participation.

The 2015 general elections afforded women in Myanmar their second major opportunity 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/region levels. In the national parliament, 23 women parliamentarians entered the upper house and 44 entered the lower house. As such, the number of female representatives in the national parliament more than doubled from 6.0% to 13.7% of all elected MPs. This percentage of female MPs drops to 10.5% of all MPs including military appointed MPs, as the military only appointed two female MPs to the lower house.

At the state/region level, 84 women were elected, tripling the number of women parliamentarians from 3.8% to 12.7%. Thus far, the military has only appointed two female MPs in the states and regions (including Yangon Region and Shan State), bringing that percentage down to 9.7% when all MPs are considered.

Ahead of the November 2015 elections, The Asia Foundation (the Foundation) partnered with Phan Tee Eain, a Myanmar organization committed to women's empowerment, to conduct a survey and in-depth interviews of the women parliamentarians who took office in 2010 and the 2012 by-elections – given their extraordinary role in Myanmar's democratic transition and the importance of their insight to those who follow. The objectives of the study are:

- Document the experiences of women parliamentarians who took office from 2011 to 2016;
- Identify issues, challenges, and experiences common to this group;
- Raise awareness about the achievements and needs of women parliamentarians; and,
- Develop recommendations and support structures for future women candidates and parliamentarians.

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, with a survey questionnaire jointly developed by the Foundation and Phan Tee Eain and supplemented by personal interviews. Forty-five women completed the written surveys, while 19 took part in personal interviews out of a total number of 55 women MPs at both national and state/region levels. A review of relevant literature was conducted and where possible and relevant, the research team also integrated data of the women MPs who came to office after the November 2015 elections.

The collective experiences of the women who were elected to represent their communities in this first parliament not only provide insight into how their work as MPs has changed the lives of people in Myanmar, but also how these experiences have changed their own expectations for government and the political process, as well as for themselves. The key findings of the research are highlighted below.

Background of Women MPs

- There is often the assumption that women MPs are not as well educated as their male counterparts. The research found that for women in both the 2011-2016 national and state/region parliaments, however, the level of educational attainment mirrored or exceeded that of their male colleagues. Eighty-six percent of women MPs in the national parliament had at least the equivalent of a bachelor's degree (compared to 76% of male MPs), and about 17 percent had post-graduate degrees (compared to 7.6% of male MPs). Women elected to the national parliament came primarily from education, legal, and business sectors. Given that some 80% of teachers in Myanmar are women, it is not surprising that a high proportion of female elected representatives came from the education sector.
- In the national parliament elected to office in the November 2015 election, women achieved generally a higher degree of educational attainment than their male counterparts, with 93.9% of them holding at least the equivalent of a bachelor's degree (compared to 77.7% of male MPs), and 22.7% who obtained post-graduate degrees (compared to 8.5% of male MPs). In the states and regions, 92.8% of the 2016 female representatives had obtained at least a bachelor's degree (compared to 66.9% of male MPs), and 10.7% had post-graduate degrees (compared to 3.2% of male MPs). For this second generation of women MPs, many more came from the business sector, community service and political work than previously.

Campaigning for Parliament

The 2010 parliamentary elections were neither free nor fair, and the National League for Democracy (NLD) boycotted them, citing a lengthy list of complaints. As such, the first post-junta national and state/region parliaments were dominated by members of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), a dominance only mildly offset by the election of 43 members of the NLD in the 2012 by-election.

While expectations for the new parliaments were considerably muted, many analysts saw the thawing of military rule as an important step forward in the evolution of Myanmar's politics. The subsequent evolution of the Thein Sein government did provide expanded space for political discourse, although this was marred by setbacks on human rights in the last years of the administration. An increasingly vibrant national parliament, however, was a significant achievement of the country's nascent democratic transition.

- For the first generation of female parliamentarians, the support most appreciated by women candidates can best be characterized as motivational or emotional support, whether it was encouragement provided by parents, extended families, communities, religious leaders, or fellow party members. Women elected in both 2010 and 2012 consistently raised the importance of such social support as critical to their ability to first mount a successful campaign and later, to manage their responsibilities as an MP. With few exceptions, those women who were married and did have living parents tended to receive strong support from spouses and parents, with 37.8% of respondents reporting 'very supportive' parents and 35.6% reporting 'very supportive' spouses. Co-workers and friends were reported by MPs to be mixed in their support of their political ambitions.
- Unsurprisingly, given the uncertain and restrictive political context in which elections were held in 2010, few political parties had significant resources to provide their candidates, much less conduct

skills-based trainings. Civil society organizations were even more constrained in the support they were able to offer to candidates, and as a result, there were major gaps in resources available to candidates at a time when those resources were sorely needed.

- Generally, women candidates for parliament in 2010 reported receiving minimal information about their future roles as representatives to the national and state/region parliaments. One MP recounted that she initially did not understand election laws, and her party did not even have copies of such procedures to offer her.
- Political parties were cited as providing the most support to their candidates in the pre-election period, though that support was often limited and inconsistent, with 69% of women reporting receiving support to conduct campaign activities and voter outreach. In contrast, only 27% of the women said they received information before the elections about the role of MPs, and the responsibilities they would assume once elected.
- Financing was a major challenge for most women, with 40% indicating that they received campaign financing from their political party. Not a single respondent reported receiving any support during the pre-election period specifically targeted to or designed to provide advice and training for female candidates. While this may be unsurprising, it is significant given the major challenges faced by women candidates within Myanmar's nascent democracy.
- Candidates frequently encountered voters who understood little about the elections and the voting process, and who had little exposure to the limited voter education and outreach efforts. This lack of information, and a general wariness toward the elections process as a whole, was particularly noted by candidates engaging with ethnic communities. Public mistrust of the conduct of the elections and reluctance to engage in the political process contributed to an atmosphere of confusion, misinformation, and fear.
- Many MPs reported accusations and criticisms from other political parties as key difficulties they faced during the campaign. The resulting campaign period was, as a practical matter, highly challenging for candidates to navigate. For example, on the campaign trail, many women candidates found it difficult to even secure lodging because local communities distrusted the electoral process and candidates, fearing reprisals from local authorities.
- These challenges were compounded by the gender of the candidates, and conservative societal expectations of appropriate behaviors of women significantly affected the experience of women while campaigning. Voters, especially other women, often questioned the propriety of women candidates traveling independently and engaging in political behavior. These experiences left an indelible impression on the women MPs once elected, as many ranked the relative lack of support from women voters as the most important obstacle preventing greater numbers of women from successfully entering politics.

Life and Work as Parliamentarians

- Most women in the survey became parliamentarians without having a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities they would assume as elected representatives. During interviews it became clear that post-election life changes were in fact quite dramatic for most women parliamentarians. MPs emphasized significant shifts in the way they came to view their responsibilities to their constituents, and their ability to act in response to community needs.
- Representatives reported an increase in trust and respect from their family and social networks, as well as growing appreciation from their constituents for their work as parliamentarians. The changes MPs experienced in their communities and social networks was generally seen as empowering. As one MP said, "No matter how high the position of a person is, if I'm doing the right thing, I dare to present about it in the parliament. I gained more self-confidence."
- The impact of their work duties on family life and household responsibilities was more pronounced

at the national level, but representatives at all levels expressed concern and guilt that work-related demands took a heavy toll on their families.

Capacity Building Support

- The number of respondents who received capacity building training regarding the roles and responsibilities as MPs was 84% at the national level and 75% at the state/region level. However, only half of the respondents reported receiving capacity building on planning and financial oversight functions, and given the centrality of understanding budgets to influencing public policy, improving training for women MPs in this area is crucial moving forward.
- Women identified a myriad of practical skills which they felt could be strengthened but for which they received limited support: constituency engagement; facilitation and communication; research; and planning and financial oversight. A lack of confidence, education, and experience were raised repeatedly throughout the survey responses as posing key obstacles to the entry of women into politics and to them thriving once engaged in politics.
- One-fifth of national level MPs received training on public speaking and communications, compared to more than half of state and regional MPs, and the desire for public speaking training was widely expressed among respondents.

Women MPs' Participation in Parliament

- At the national level, all elected women representatives belonged to at least one committee, although very few held leadership positions on such committees. Some respondents identified a lack of confidence and technical skills as significant barriers that prevented them from wanting, or trying to, become committee chairs.
- As individuals, the women in parliament participated in raising both starred (those to be answered publicly) and non-starred questions (those to be answered in writing). But the number of questions submitted by women MPs was much smaller compared to the number of questions submitted by their male colleagues. At the union-level, women MPs generated 409 starred questions out of a total of 6,227 starred questions raised by all parliamentarians (6.6%) and 590 non-starred questions out of 9,454 questions (6.2%). Some respondents felt that women received fewer opportunities to raise questions, although opinions varied regarding possible explanations, and the questions raised by women MPs steadily increased over the sessions examined.
- Twelve women MPs, or 27% of total women MPs, at the national and state/region level parliaments indicated that they had initiated or introduced legislation during their tenure.
- The women surveyed reported being most active on women's issues (57% very active) and rural development (57% very active). This was followed by education (50% very active), social and community affairs (48% very active), gender equality (45% very active), constitutional affairs (41% very active), and health care (39% very active). There was a notable lack of self-reported engagement in the areas of research and technology (5% very active) and foreign affairs (5% very active.)
- Collaboration between women in parliament occurred most frequently within parties. Very little collaboration with other women across party lines occurred toward developing legislation or awareness raising.

Interactions with Constituents and Access to Information

- When asked to share the top three concerns of their constituents, more than half of all respondents (51.5%) highlighted poverty, infrastructure development (37.8%), followed by the use and trafficking of illegal drugs (35.6%) and education (35.6%).
- Female representatives overwhelmingly indicated that their information about constituent needs came directly from constituents. State/region MPs reported receiving information about constituent needs more frequently from local township and village authorities than their colleagues at the national

level. Respondents reported varying degrees of engagement with local authorities in efforts to resolve community level problems. Some viewed effective working relationships with local officials as key to conflict resolution, while others tended to view such officials as more of an obstacle than potential collaborator.

- Some respondents, particularly those receiving information from parliamentary offices and international organizations, felt overwhelmed and experienced difficulty in selecting the most useful information from the many reports, data, references, and evidence with which they were presented. The findings suggest that a lack of information may be less of a problem for MPs than figuring out effective study techniques or strategies to synthesize information. The respondents explained that not having skilled office staff or assistance with research were other key challenges. They repeatedly mentioned the utility of a potential staffer with computer literacy skills who could assist them with research and travel with them to constituencies.

Women MPs and Political Parties

- Although women MPs overwhelmingly indicated that they felt first and foremost obligated to represent the interests of their constituencies, they also often felt constrained by their own party policies or directives, and that their individual views were often unwelcome or irrelevant in the face of party priorities.
- While 71% of respondents agreed strongly, and 11% agreed, with the statement that representatives are free to address issues regardless of party support, almost half of all respondents (49%) agreed strongly or somewhat that MPs could only address women's issues if the party had developed specific policies to do so.

Gender-based Discrimination

- When asked directly about their experience of gender-based discrimination during their political careers, one-third of respondents indicated that they had faced such discrimination. While this might seem to be a relatively low figure, it needs to be taken in context. Myanmar continues to face widespread entrenched societal bias against women generally, and especially women in positions of leadership. When representatives were later interviewed in depth, it became clear that the MP's faced many challenges that would be categorized as discrimination.
- Many representatives who had not indicated experiencing discrimination in the written surveys described being treated differently than men in their interviews. Women raised specific incidents of disrespect or verbal abuse which they felt their male peers would not have been subjected to, especially from government employees. They also discussed being excluded from male-dominated discussions on policy, whether during party meetings or informal gatherings of male MPs at local restaurants or drinking establishments.

Increasing Women's Participation

- Although the overwhelming victory of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's party in the 2015 elections could lead some to suggest that claims of bias against women in public office are overblown in Myanmar, public opinion polls and qualitative research have shown clearly that there is strong public bias against women in positions of leadership, and against women's engagement in politics specifically. Women MPs ranked a lack of confidence, a lack of education, and the lack of financing as the biggest obstacles faced by women politicians. Female representatives also noted that increasing men's engagement and support for gender equality was the most effective way to increase the number of women in politics, with 71% stating it would be 'strongly effective,' and an additional 16% believing it would be 'effective.'
- Yet perhaps one of the more surprising findings from the survey was the fact that female parliamentarians felt even less support from other female voters than from male voters. Eighty-two percent of respondents felt "very much" that lack of support from other women prevented women from entering politics, while only 51% of respondents felt that lack of support from male voters was an equally significant obstacle.

- Representatives were somewhat less enthusiastic but still felt strongly about the efficacy of campaigns to raise awareness among the voting public (58% ‘strongly effective’ and 24% ‘effective,’) and the oft-discussed use of quotas mandating the number of women in political office (51% ‘strongly effective’; 24% ‘effective’).

Reflection on the survey findings and insightful advice from the women MPs of the 2011-2016 parliaments

This report seeks to provide a more in depth view of the experiences of the first generation of women MPs who were in office between 2011 and 2016 to understand their motivations and challenges in political life. The research team hopes that insights gained from the study would be useful for the next generation of women MPs as well as for the government, political parties, civil society organizations and the broader development community in providing more targeted support to strengthen women’s political participation.

Following the key findings of the research presented above, a summary of some broader reflections of the survey data and what implications they may have for future programs aimed at supporting more women in political life in Myanmar and in parliament in particular is also provided. Some of the women MPs’ insights and advice to the next generation of women MPs based on their own hard won experiences is also detailed.

The most consistent theme running through their suggestions relate to the importance of self-confidence. Being prepared, persistent, and open to learning and working with others, as well as building trust, were all seen as key elements of success by these trailblazing women MPs. Again and again, however, it was the call for faith in oneself that underscored the advice of one generation of women MPs to the next.

“Try hard for people to see you as a person they can trust, not only as a woman. You need to be strong. Don’t be discouraged when you face difficulties. You will be hearing about many problems from your constituents and solving the problems for them. So, please be patient. You will also need to learn from them and try to explain to them so that they can have better understanding of whatever is the situation. On the technical side, study laws. You need to study a lot.”¹

Women MPs felt strongly that the biggest challenge for them were not their male counterparts or male voters, but other women voters who did not support women in political life. This is perhaps one of the more surprising findings from the research. The view came out very clearly from the women MPs’ responses to the survey questionnaire, with 82% of the women MPs indicating that the “lack of support from women voters” were their number one obstacle in preventing women from entering politics, much higher than the prevailing cultural norms (58%) or male voters (51%). This issue was not much discussed by the women MPs during in depth interviews or in other forums, but they did specifically raise their sense of discomfort with the disapproval they received when they traveled to campaign, much of which came from other women who viewed their political activities as inappropriate. This may be an uncomfortable truth for the women MPs themselves to recognize and to highlight, but it underscores similar findings from other relevant research on women’s political participation and women’s empowerment that embedded socio-cultural norms impacting gender equality are as entrenched among women as men in Myanmar. This is an important factor in considering what should be the right strategy for women’s empowerment programs. The gender gap is not simply between men and women but also reflects a significant knowledge and awareness gap that exists among women in society, which may hinder their support for legislations, policies, and practices for gender equality and empowerment.

Self-confidence is arguably the most important factor in the performance of women MPs. The issue of self-confidence, or lack thereof, was a consistent theme in the analysis of the survey data. Based on empirical data women MPs were just as or more educated and often just as active in Parliament as their male counterparts, but they often perceived themselves as lacking in knowledge and skills, less confident and less active than their male peers. This sense of being less than others can make the women MPs less comfortable and less active in pushing forward their own views and assessments, believing that others know more than they do even when

¹ Interview, MP4.

the data shows otherwise. When asked about the obstacles preventing women from entering politics, 80% of the women MPs resoundingly pointed to “lack of confidence” as the second most important obstacle.

The advice that the women MPs have for the next generation of women MPs shows that they are clearly aware that their sense of confidence, embedded in cultural and social norms, have impacted their development and their work. As such, this is a factor that should be well considered in any programs aimed at supporting women in politics.

“No one is a master since s/he was born. We become knowledgeable and efficient because of nurturing from the environment and communicating with people. Don’t look down on yourself. Your capability in your family is the same as your capability in the outside world. The important thing is to have high confidence. Your will is the key. If you intend to work for the betterment of your family, environment and country, you will be successful. If you can’t do it alone, you can work together with others. That will make you successful.”²

“Willingness to work and have strong will. Build up your capacity so that you will become qualified. Have self-confidence. Withstand the pressure and sacrifice when needed. Instead of thinking what you can get, think of what you can give. You must always think of how to be successful. Always encourage yourself.”³

“Don’t be afraid. No need to be that afraid of politics. Please study about the nature of politics.”⁴

Women MPs need more training and skills in technical areas (such as legislative drafting and budgeting) and public speaking/communication to be more effective in Parliament. Parliaments have provided women MPs with more technical skill-based capacity development on issues such as research, legislative drafting, planning, and finance. Political parties have played a critical role in supporting MPs with constituent engagement. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have focused more on gender-inclusive policy development programs for women MPs. With regard to capacity building, the women MPs felt strongly that they needed more technical training in areas such as legislative drafting and budget analysis and oversight to help them engage substantively with these critical topics related to their roles as MPs. Secondly, women MPs also felt strongly about improving their communication skills and public speaking ability to increase their self-confidence, effectiveness when campaigning as candidates and communication with the public as MPs.

“Read more to become knowledgeable and always work with full confidence. Approach professionals to get their help and try to become proficient with the work that you need to do in the parliament.”⁵

“Make sure that you understand the law and politics (read more journals). You should know that in detail. Look at how big parties work.”⁶

“You need to know how to search for information. Another important thing is good communication skill and a habit of working together with others. You need to put yourself into other people’s shoes and understand their perspectives. Always improve yourself. Read books, especially study about laws. Keep updated with information.”⁷

“You should expect difficulties. You need to learn about budget, public speaking skills and law in advance. Don’t be arrogant. Be persistent.”⁸

² MP10’s response to questionnaire #41.

³ MP39’s response to questionnaire #41.

⁴ Interview, MP8.

⁵ MP10’s response to questionnaire #41.

⁶ MP14’s response to questionnaire #41.

⁷ Interview, MP29.

⁸ MP31’s response to questionnaire #41.

Women MPs faced a wide range of incidents of discrimination, but they are often reluctant to frame such behavior or action as gender-based. Only one-third (33%) of women MPs surveyed indicated that they had experienced gender-based discrimination in their political careers, raising specific incidents of disrespect or verbal abuse which they felt their male peers would not have been subjected to, especially from government employees, then by party leaders and male colleagues in parliament. During in depth interviews however, many women MPs who had not indicated experiencing discrimination in the survey described being excluded from male-dominated discussions on policy, whether during party meetings or informal gatherings of male MPs at local restaurants or drinking establishments; being excluded from learning opportunities such as study tours; and being addressed with patronizing language on the floor of parliament or in party meetings. Given the small number of women MPs, their own political activism and the sense of disapproval they feel from many in the broader society particularly other women, women MPs themselves tend not to define some of the challenges they faced as gender-based. As such, there is little common perspective among the women MPs on the gender dimension of their work and what may be effective solutions that they can pursue whether individually or as a group.

Political parties are particularly important in providing critical support to MPs in Myanmar, including women MPs, but their general lack of gender-related policies are hindering potential legislative progress on gender equality. The research shows the critical role that political parties play in supporting political candidates in their campaigning and then in their roles as MPs. The support MPs get from their political parties is the most consistent in their political life. At the same time, however, given that political parties were suppressed for many years under military rule and have only been able to operate openly in recent years, such support to political candidates and to MPs is minimal but critical. Political party development is nascent and as such, political parties do not yet have a clear gender focus, but MPs are bound to adhere to the policies of their political parties. There is clear tension between the women MPs' sense of independence, including their commitment to gender issues, and their adherence to party policies. Ninety-one percent of the women MPs surveyed felt very strong commitment to represent the interests of women, with 71% of them stating that they are independent to follow through their own interest without party support. Yet 29% of women MPs surveyed also feel very strongly that they cannot do anything about a particular issue if there is no supporting party policy. As such, there is a strong need to work with political parties to help define the appropriate gender platform they should have and accompanying policies to assist all MPs, and women MPs in particular, to support gender equality and empowerment in Myanmar.

Women MPs don't regularly collaborate among themselves. Collaboration between women in Parliament occurred most frequently among women who shared a party. Respondents most frequently collaborated with women from within their own parties to advocate for the passage of legislation. Committee assignments seemed to provide the primary opportunity for women to work with women from other parties, but otherwise there is very little collaboration across party lines. In this context, increasing opportunities for women to regularly connect and engage meaningfully with other women, especially across party lines, can facilitate the development of professional support networks and the collective power to advance shared interests – particularly on issues of specific concern to women.

“Women should cooperate with each other. Women should be involved in the decision-making process. They need to believe that they can do it.”⁹

⁹ Interview, MP14.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Asia Foundation and Phan Tee Eain conducted a survey and a series of in-depth interviews with women parliamentarians who were elected in 2010 and the 2012 by-election to collectively document their experiences, identify shared challenges, and develop recommendations for future women candidates and parliamentarians. For the first elected parliaments of the term 2011-2016, about 6% of the national parliament and 3.8% of the state/region parliaments were women. The percentage of women holding decision-making positions in state/region and district level party organization structures as well as the judiciary were low. The 2015 general elections did increase the number of female elected members of parliament to 13.7% in the Union Parliament and 12.5% in the states/regions, but women representation in the executive and judicial branches of government remains low. A number of factors contributing to the low level of women participation in politics have been identified by researchers, including a lack of experience and skills as well as deeply held cultural norms favoring male leadership that is internalized by both men and women.

On paper, Myanmar has been one of the most progressive states in Asia with regard to the role of women in political life. Women were granted franchise and the constitutional right of equal political participation in 1935, one of the earliest countries in Asia to do so. In 1995, Myanmar endorsed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which aims to remove obstacles to women's participation in both public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural, and political decision-making.¹ In 1997, Myanmar also became a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, or CEDAW, accepting the convention's obligation to help end all direct and indirect discrimination against women, and to undertake appropriate measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women in all fields.²

At the country-level, the Myanmar National Committee for Women Affairs, or MNCWA, was reestablished in 2012 by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement to contribute to women's advancement. The National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women 2013-2022, or NSPAW, was developed through collaboration with concerned ministries, agencies, and organizations.³ The plan identified women's role in decision-making as a key priority, and committed to improving systems, structures, and practices to ensure women's equal participation and leadership in governance at all levels of society.

Despite impressive official commitments in planning documents, however, women's ability to take part in Myanmar's governance and political life has substantially lagged.⁴

1.1 Women's Political Participation and Representation in Myanmar

The 2010 general elections in Myanmar represented a historic transition from more than six decades of military rule to civilian government. Members were elected to a new national, bicameral parliament or '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*). In addition, parliaments were also established for the 14 states and regions.

¹ The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was an outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which was convened on September 4-15, 1995 in Beijing, China. The platform was endorsed by 189 countries, including Myanmar.

² The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. It is frequently referred to as an international bill of rights for women and it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Government of Myanmar State Report and "Shadow Reports" on the situation of women's rights and discrimination in Myanmar by civil society groups were presented in Geneva on July, 2016.

³ The National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women 2013-2022 (NSPAW) identified twelve priority areas which include livelihood; education and training; health; violence against women; emergencies; economy; decision-making; institutional mechanisms; human rights; media; environment; and girls.

⁴ See Paul Minoletti, *Gender (In)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change*. Yangon: The Asia Foundation, April 2016.

While the military ensured that it retained an important measure of control by reserving 25% of all parliamentary seats at both the national and state/region levels, the Union Parliament of 2011-2016 surprised observers by being much more active than expected. Parliamentary debates were lively, and legislators were willing to subject the executive branch to difficult questions.

The representation of women in Parliament, however, was small. A mere 28 seats out of 466 elected seats total,⁵ or 6%, of elected national parliamentarians were women, with four holding seats in the upper house and twenty-four in the lower house. (Additionally, in January 2014 only two women MPs were appointed to the 166-seats representing the military bloc in the national parliament; previously there were no female military MPs.)⁶

Among the 659 elected seats across the 14 state/region level parliaments, women only won 25, or 3.8% of the, seats. Only one female military MP was appointed at the state/region (in the Yangon Region Parliament in 2014).⁷ Not a single woman was elected in 6 of the 14 state/region parliaments (Kayah, Kayin, Chin, and Mon States; Sagaing and Tanintharyi Regions.)⁸ Shan State had the highest level of women's representation with eight women MPs, while the Yangon Region Parliament was second with six women MPs. The Mandalay and Magway Region Parliaments had one women MP each. Across the 14 state/region parliaments, only four women held ministerial positions.⁹

The 2015 general elections afforded women in Myanmar their second major opportunity 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/region levels. The number of female representatives in the National Parliament more than doubled from 6.0% to 13.7% of all elected MPs; 23 women parliamentarians entered the upper house and 44 in the lower house. The military appointed only two female MPs to the lower house. When all MPs are considered, which include the appointed military MPs, the number of female MPs declines from 13.7% to 10.5%.

At the state/region level, 84 women were elected tripling the number of female elected parliamentarians from 3.8% to 12.7%. Thus far, the military has only appointed two female MPs in the states and regions (one in Yangon Region and one in Shan State), bringing that percentage down to 9.7% when all MPs are considered.¹⁰ Across the 14 states and regions, there are also only four women holding ministerial positions in the current government, with two in Yangon Region and two in Ayeyarwady Region. For the first time, there are two female chief ministers in Kayin State and Tanintharyi Region.

⁵ Egretreau (2014) stated that there were 30 elected women parliamentarians in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw after the 2012 by-elections. By the time this study was conducted in late 2014 and early 2015, however, that number decreased to 28 due to two women parliamentarians from Pyithu Hluttaw being shifted into the government ministries. Daw Win Maw Tun was appointed as a Deputy Minister for Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security. Daw Su Su Hlaing was appointed as a Deputy Minister for Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. This study has updated data on women MP's participation based on direct information received from the parliament office, hence the slight differences between Egretreau's data and other early sources compared to those used in this study.

⁶ The two female military MPs were Lt-Col Daw Soe Soe Myint and Lt-Col Daw San Thida Khin. Radio Free Asia. 2014. *Myanmar Military's First Women Representatives Join Parliament*. Radio Free Asia Online News [Online] 14 January, 2014.

⁷ Lieutenant Commander Daw Hnin Yu Kyaw.

⁸ Minoletti, 2014.

⁹ In Kachin State Parliament, Daw Khin Pyone Yi served as a Minister for the Shan National Race Affairs and Daw Bauk Ja as a Minister for the Education, Social Affairs/Religious and Cultural Affairs. Daw San San Nwe was the only women Minister in the Yangon Region Parliament, as the Minister for Finance and Revenue. In the Ayeyarwady Regional Parliament, Daw Khin Saw became a Minister for Social Affairs. See Phan Tee Eain and The Gender Equality Network. (2013). *Myanmar: Women in Parliament 2014*.

¹⁰ Lieutenant Commander Daw Maw Maw Than was appointed in Yangon Region Hluttaw and then transferred to Shan State Hluttaw.

Table 1: Women in Myanmar's National and State/Region Parliaments, 2011–2016 and 2016–2021

	Elected MPs		Military-appointed MPs		Women as % of Elected MPs		Women as % of All MPs	
	Women/ Men 2011-16	Women/ Men 2016-21	Women/ Men 2011-16	Women/ Men 2016-21	2011- 2016	2016- 2021	2011- 2016	2016- 2021
National Parliament Total (the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw)	28/438	67/424	2/164	2/164	6.0%	13.7%	4.8%	10.5%
Upper House (the Amyotha Hluttaw)	4/155	23/145	0/56	0/56	2.5%	13.7%	1.8%	10.3%
Lower House (Pyithu Hluttaw)	24/283	44/279	2/108	2/108	7.8%	13.6%	6.2%	10.6%
State/Region Parliaments	25/634	84/575	1/221	2/219	3.8%	12.7%	2.9%	9.7%

Source: Amyotha Hluttaw Office; Pyithu Hluttaw Office; Phan Tee Eain and The Gender Equality Network 2014; and Union Election Commission Myanmar

The trend of women's political participation in Myanmar across these two elections is positive, but still lags behind most countries in region. With 10.5% women's representation at the national level (including Military MPs), Myanmar ranked ahead of Thailand (6%) and Malaysia (10.4%), but behind the Philippines (27.2%), Lao PDR (25%), Vietnam (25.3%), Singapore (23.9%), China (23.6%), Cambodia (20.3%), Bangladesh (20%), and Indonesia (17.1%). (The global average is 22.9% female parliamentarians in nationally elected bodies.)¹¹

Myanmar now has more than 90 political parties, but only a handful have concrete policies promoting women's participation or set aside reservations for women candidates. According to a survey of 34 leading political parties carried out by Phan Tee Eain in December 2014, 60% of party members in Myanmar are men and 40% women. The gender imbalance within the Central Executive Committees (CECs) of political parties was striking; 90% of CEC members are male. The percentage of women holding decision-making positions is even lower (6%) in state/region and district level party organization structures.

Women held only two of the 33 ministerial positions in President Thein Sein's government. When Daw Mya Mya Ohn Khin was appointed minister of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement in December 2012, she was Myanmar's first female cabinet minister in 60 years. (Daw Ba Maung Chain from Karen State in 1953 was the last.)¹² The other 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 in February 2014.¹³

Six women were appointed to deputy ministerial positions: Daw Le Le Thein (Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development); Daw Sandar Khin (Ministry of Culture); Daw Su Su Hlaing (Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement); Dr. Daw Thet Thet Zin (Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry); and, Daw Win Maw Tun (Ministry of Health).¹⁴ Of Myanmar's 16,785 ward and village administrators, only 42 are

¹¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif011115.htm> [accessed June 1, 2015 and May 3, 2016].

¹² Michaels, 2014.

¹³ Snaing, 2014.

¹⁴ Phan Tee Eain and Gender Equality Network, 2014.

women.¹⁵ None of the country's 330 township administrators are women.¹⁶ The number of women in senior judiciary positions is also discouraging. None of the seven Supreme Court justices are women, and of the 52 High Court judges in the 14 state and region High Courts only 17 are women.

While the number of women MPs at both national and state/region levels has increased post-2015 elections, the only woman in the cabinet of the new NLD-led government formed in March 2016 is Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The 14 chief ministers of the states/regions appointed by the President are all NLD members, but only two are women. Many in Myanmar are well aware that the new government needs to carefully balance the varied interests of the different key groups, but there are also concerns that gender equality is being neglected in the democratic transition.¹⁷

A number of factors have been commonly identified as contributing to the low level of women's political participation: a lack of experience and certain skills; a lack of confidence; restrictions on women's travel; a broad social perception that politics is both dangerous and a man's realm; traditional norms that ascribe authority to men; and resistance to female leadership. A 2014 national civic knowledge and values survey by The Asia Foundation found that an overwhelming three-quarters of all respondents believed that men make better leaders than women in politics, a finding that held true even when data was disaggregated by gender.¹⁸ A major 2015 study by the Gender Equality Network further emphasized that a fundamental challenge to the gender equality discourse in Myanmar is the fact that deeply held social, cultural and religious views passed down over generations have led to the internalization of hierarchical gender relations by both men and women, "making them hard to see, but also very hard to question."¹⁹ The internalization of unequal gender values by women is particularly challenging, an issue that is also reflected in this study by the women parliamentarian themselves.

1.2 Survey Objectives, Methodology, and Limitations

Given the extraordinary role the first generation of women parliamentarians have played in Myanmar's democratic transition and the importance of their insight to those who will follow, the Foundation and Phan Tee Eain partnered to conduct a survey and a series of interviews of the women parliamentarians who took office in 2010 and the 2012 by-election. The work was done with the following objectives:

- Document the experiences of the historic group of women elected to take political office from 2011 to 2016;
- Identify the common issues, challenges, and experiences among this cohort;
- Raise awareness about both the achievements and continuing needs of women parliamentarians in Myanmar; and,
- Draw upon lessons learned to develop recommendations and support structures for future women candidates and parliamentarians.

The research team hopes that the findings can: help inform and sustain public dialogue about women's participation in politics; serve as a continuing platform through which to engage with representatives of Myanmar's parliamentary bodies; and provide parliamentary institutions, parliamentarians, political parties, civil society organizations, development partners, and other stakeholders with crucial information to shape programming designed to increase women's political representation.

This study applied both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The survey questionnaire was jointly developed by the Foundation and Phan Tee Eain in late September 2014. Some questions in the questionnaire

¹⁵ UNDP Myanmar, *Women and Local Leadership. Leadership Journeys of Myanmar's Female Village Track/Award Administrators*, 2015, pp. 19.

¹⁶ Kyi Pyar Chit Saw and Matthew Arnold, *Administering the State in Myanmar: An Overview of the General Administration Department*, March 2015, pp. 17.

¹⁷ Fiona MacGregor, "Myanmar's new cabinet: national reconciliation without equality". *Myanmar Times*, 25 March 2016.

¹⁸ The Asia Foundation, *Myanmar 2014: Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society*. Yangon: The Asia Foundation, 2014, pp. 29-30.

¹⁹ Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain: Cultural Norms, Social Practices and Gender Equality in Myanmar*. Yangon, 2015, pp. 17.

were drawn from the 2008 report, “Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments” by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and revised to meet with the objectives of this survey. The questions were carefully designed to understand women parliamentarians’ background and explore important issues such as their entry into politics, life as an MP, constituency engagement, and their experiences in parliament.

To ensure that the questionnaire adequately and appropriately engaged issues relevant to the experiences of women in Myanmar’s parliaments, consultations on the draft questionnaire were held with selected MPs at the national and state/region levels representing diverse political backgrounds, as well as leaders of key civil society organizations focused on women’s advancement through political participation. Feedback from these consultations was incorporated into a final questionnaire, which was translated into Burmese and disseminated to women members of parliament across the country.²⁰

Dissemination of the questionnaires and collection of completed questionnaires began in mid-October 2014 and continued through the end of that year. By the end of March 2015, 24 completed questionnaires were collected from 28 women MPs serving at the national level and 21 completed questionnaires were collected from 25 women MPs serving in state/region parliaments.

From January to February 2015, 19 personal interviews were carried out with women parliamentarians from both the national and state/region levels. In March 2015, a forum for women MPs was convened in Nay Pyi Taw to discuss common challenges faced by women across parliamentary bodies, and the procedural constraints distinct to their specific institutions. The preliminary findings of the survey were presented to 19 women MPs and their feedback was incorporated into this report. In addition, a desk review was conducted of reports previously issued by international and local organizations, media accounts, parliamentary proceedings, and the weekly government gazette.

Because of the limited sample size (largely driven by the limited number of women parliamentarians), this report does not fully shed light into a number of important issues at the subnational level. Limitations also stem from the fact that some of the parliamentarians surveyed lacked familiarity with answering a long questionnaire, and some of their questionnaire answers were inconsistent with face-to-face responses. The interview teams regularly needed to clarify and confirm the meaning of responses, and the ability for the research team to test survey data against personal interviews was critical.

Additionally, the Foundation and Phan Tee Ain held the first “Women MPs Forum” in March 2015 with the participation of 18 women national and state/region parliamentarians to consult on the initial findings and to provide an important networking opportunity across party lines. The feedback of the women MPs at the forum provided additional clarifications on a number of issues for the research team. An abundance of challenges clearly remains given that parliamentary experience is so new to Myanmar and to the pioneering women MPs in these early years of the democratic transition.

²⁰ The survey questionnaire is provided in Annex 2.

Chapter 2: Background of Women in Parliament

Women in both the national and state/region parliaments were found to have an impressive level of educational attainment. Eighty-six percent of women MPs in the national parliament had at least the equivalent of a bachelor's degree, and about 17% had post-graduate degrees. Women in the national parliament came from a variety of backgrounds, particularly from education, legal, and business sectors. Most of these women entered politics either through community service or activism. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was widely cited by women parliamentarians as an inspirational role model.

2.1 Educational Attainment

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 level of educational attainment mirrored or exceeded that of their male colleagues. Eighty-six percent of women MPs in the national parliament had at least the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in arts, law, or science. About 17% had post-graduate degrees, including 6.7% who obtained doctorates. In comparison, 76% of men in the national parliament had the equivalent of a bachelor's degree, 7.6% have post-graduate degrees, and 1.3% held doctorates.

Table 2: National Parliamentary Educational Attainment

Degree Obtained	Men (N=461)	Women (N=30)
Basic Education	18.4%	6.7%
BE+	4.3%	6.7%
BA/BSc/LLB	68.3%	53.3%
BA/BSc+	N/A	16.7%
MA/MMedSc	6.3%	10.0%
PhD/DrMedSc	1.3%	6.7%
Unknown	1.3%	0.0%

Source: The Parliaments of Myanmar, MCM Books (Yangon, June 2013); Survey Responses

Seventy-five percent of women representatives in the state/region parliaments had at least the equivalent of a bachelor's degree, and an estimated 25% held post-graduate degrees. While comprehensive information about the educational background of male representatives in the state/region parliaments was not available for comparison, the data on national parliamentarians during the 2011-2016 term, taken together with data on incoming parliamentarians in 2016-2021, *infra*, suggest that women parliamentarians were as well as, or better, educated than their male peers.

Table 3: State/Region Parliamentary Educational Attainment

Degree Obtained	Women (N=20)
Basic Education	20%
BE+	5 %
BA/BSc/LLB	35%
BA/BSc+	15%
MA/MMedSc	10%
PhD/DrMedSc	15%
Unknown	0%

Source: Survey responses

2.2 Occupational Background

Women elected to the national parliament appear to come from different occupational backgrounds than their male colleagues. One-fifth of all elected national parliamentarians came from a business background, primarily reflecting experiences as shopkeepers, merchants, and small business owners. Only 27, or 3.6%, of all national parliamentarians previously worked in the legal profession. Yet, of these 27 lawyers in the national parliament, six, or more than 20%, were women.²¹

A substantial proportion (12.6%) of all MPs came from a background in education. Occupations in the education sector (previous employment either as primary and secondary school teachers, or as university-level lecturers) were even more pronounced for women MPs' professional backgrounds in both the national (20.0%) and state/region parliaments (40.0%).

Table 4: Occupational Background of National and State/Region Parliamentarians

National Parliamentarians (All)		National Women Parliamentarians (N=30)		State/region Women Parliamentarians (N=20)	
Business	21.4%	Law	20.0%	Education	40.0%
Education	12.6%	Education	20.0%	Politics	20.0%
Civil service/ politics	12.3%	Civil service/ politics	20.0%	Social work	10.0%
Medicine	6.2%	Business	16.7%	Business	10.0%
Agriculture	6.1%	Social work	10.0%	Medicine	5.0%
Law	3.6%	Medicine	6.7%	Law	5.0%

Source: The Parliaments of Myanmar, MCM Books (Yangon, June 2013); Egreteau; Survey Responses

²¹ Egreteau, 2014.

The differences in occupational background between men and women in parliament may reflect the occupational choices made by women in Myanmar, constrained as they are by what society deems to be gender appropriate. Teaching has been noted as one of the limited professional opportunities for women that allows them to have a respectable career without challenging gender norms.²² Some 80% of teachers in Myanmar are women, and thus it is not surprising that a high proportion of female elected representatives come from the education sector.²³

2.3 Inspirations and Pathways to Political Life

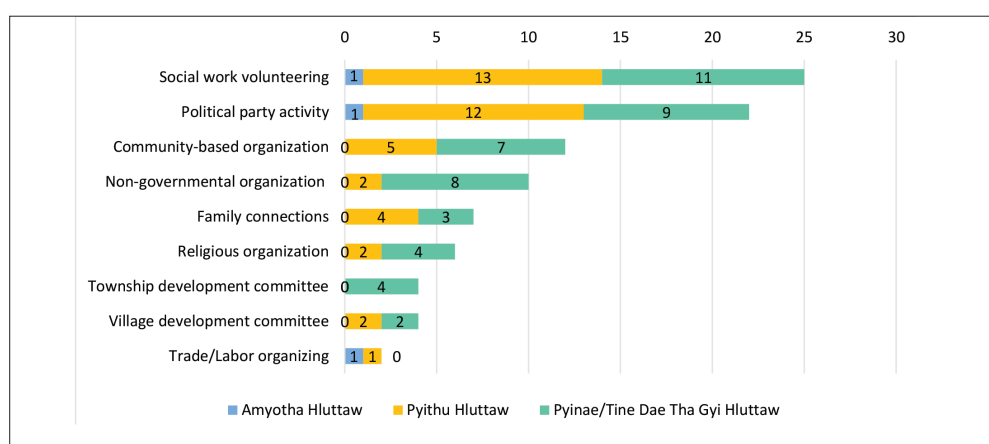
Women parliamentarians, hailing from diverse backgrounds, cited a variety of role models in their survey responses. Unsurprisingly, about one-fourth of the respondents (five in total) who were all from the NLD indicated that the most significant inspiration for them was Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD chairperson and a Nobel laureate. Respondents cited a number of reasons in seeing her as their role model, including her strength of character and her ability. One respondent commented, “Her will is different from others. She is decisive and willing to sacrifice. She strives for what she wants. That’s her perseverance.”²⁴

For some women MPs, Aung San Suu Kyi is an inspirational figure because of her lineage as the daughter of General Aung San whom many view as the founding father of the country as it became independent from colonial rule.²⁵ Three respondents cited General Aung San as a role model, and they praised what they saw as his modesty and honesty. One respondent said, “When we visit General Aung San’s house, there are no luxurious facilities. I like it very much. I like his honesty. Leaders must be honest like him.”²⁶

One respondent said she admired General Aung San very much from a young age, and when she became an NLD party member and worked closely with Aung San Suu Kyi, she became her role model. Using the familiar phrase for referring to Aung San Suu Kyi, another respondent from the lower house said, “My role model is Daw Su. When she first entered politics, we saw her as a daughter of General Aung San and someone who could lead our country. By working with her, I like her very much and take her as an example, but I can’t be like her. There’s no weakness in her way of answering questions and thinking. The way she thinks is different from us. It’s modernized.”²⁷

Several women MPs also expressed their respect and admiration for older women MPs who entered politics during or after the 1988 movement, while others mentioned their parents as role models.

Figure 1: How Women Representatives Became Involved in Politics²⁸



²² The Gender Equality Network, 2015.

²³ Asian Development Bank, 2014.

²⁴ Interview, MP9.

²⁵ Interview, MP35.

²⁶ Interview, MP24.

²⁷ Interview, MP31.

²⁸ 45 respondents.

In general, there were two main pathways through which women MPs entered into politics – community service and political activism. Twenty-four respondents overwhelmingly identified their social work and engagement in CSOs and NGOs as drawing them into politics. A similarly high number (22 respondents) also became engaged through political party activity, especially efforts inspired by the 1988 democracy movement and political activism of their parents' generation. Some respondents had previously worked in township and village development committees before they entered into politics. A few others reported development needs in their community, family connections, and religious organizations as motivating factors for becoming engaged in politics.

Chapter 3: Campaigning for Parliament

Women campaigning for parliamentary seats faced a remarkable series of challenges: the elections were held in a restrictive environment; the public was wary of politicians for fear of official reprisal; and women candidates had little training or formal information about the role of an MP. Political parties were cited as providing the most support to their candidates in the pre-election period, though that support was often limited, and almost all of the candidates identified fundraising and the demands of travel as challenges. Not a single respondent reported receiving support during the pre-election period related to advice and training specifically for female candidates. The support most appreciated by women candidates was motivational or emotional support, whether it was encouragement provided by parents, extended families, communities, religious leaders, or fellow party members.

3.1 The 2010 General Elections

The parliamentary elections of 2010 were widely regarded as neither free nor fair. The NLD boycotted the elections citing a lengthy list of problems, including the legal framework under which it was conducted and the fact that its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, would continue to be held under house arrest and prohibited from competing. The subsequent election was substantially marred by a lack of transparency and widespread allegations of vote manipulation in closely contested races. Unsurprisingly, the first post-junta Union and regional parliaments were dominated by members of the military-backed USDP, a dominance only mildly offset by the election of 43 members of the NLD in the 2012 by-election.

There was considerable debate whether the flawed election of predominantly USDP representatives reflected a genuine step forward in a transition toward civilian-led, democratic government in Myanmar. Expectations for the new parliament were, therefore, limited, but as the Myanmar analyst Richard Horsey argued:

The significance of the [2010] elections has never been dependent on their free and fair conduct. The opportunities lay elsewhere, with the resumption of legal political activity and discussion...something that has been impossible for most of the last half-century; with the generational transition within the military; with the separation between military and government; and with the introduction of regional legislatures and a limited devolution of governance. Some of these developments are tentative, not all may prove positive, but they do represent change and opportunity in a situation that has been frozen for many years.²⁹

The subsequent evolution of the Thein Sein government did provide expanded space for political discourse, although this was significantly marred by setbacks on human rights in the last several years of the administration, including arrests of students and activists for criticisms of the government and protests over social issues, including educational reform. The emergence of the national parliament as an increasingly vibrant forum for discussion and resolution of challenges facing the country was compelling. Members of parliament between 2011 and 2016 collectively exceeded many expectations of what would be permitted and possible.

The collective experiences of the women who were elected to represent their communities in this first parliament not only provide insight into how their work as MPs has changed the lives of people in Myanmar, but how these experiences have changed these women's expectations for government and the political process.

3.2 Familial, Social, and Professional Network Support

When asked what kinds of support were most valuable before and during the 2010 and 2012 elections, women MPs didn't always complete their responses across all categories so there was a high "no response"

²⁹ Horsey, 2010.

for this question. Instead, a number of MPs simply focused on a few key support categories, such as parents or friends and left other categories blank. Nevertheless, when survey data is combined with data from the individual interviews, clear themes emerged. The support most appreciated by women candidates can best be characterized as motivational or emotional support, whether it was encouragement provided by parents, extended family, communities, religious leaders, or fellow party members. Women elected in both 2010 and 2012 consistently raised the importance of such social support as critical to their ability first to mount a successful campaign and later to manage their responsibilities as an MP. Support from a patron or mentor was most frequently noted by MPs as important (42% ‘very supportive’), followed by support of parents, spouses, co-workers, and friends.

Table 5: How Supportive were the following People of your Involvement in Politics?

	Very supportive	A little supportive	Neither supportive nor Unsup-portive	Not very supportive	Very unsup-portive	Don't know	No response
Patron/mentor	42.2%	20.0%	2.2%	2.2 %	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%
Parents	37.8%	4.4%	6.7%	4.4%	8.9%	2.2%	35.6%
Spouse/ domestic partner	35.6%	4.4%	0.0%	4.4%	4.4%	2.2%	48.9%
Co-workers/ professional col-leagues	35.6%	28.9%	6.7%	6.7%	2.2%	2.2%	17.8%
Friends	33.3%	24.4%	4.4%	8.9%	2.2%	2.2%	24.4%
Social networks/ associations	28.9%	15.6%	0.0%	4.4%	4.4%	13.3%	33.3%
Neighbors/ local community	26.7%	15.6%	4.4%	4.4%	6.7%	2.2%	40.0%
Relatives	17.8%	26.7%	4.4%	11.1%	8.9%	2.2%	28.9%
Professional net-works/ associa-tions	4.4%	15.6%	6.7%	2.2%	4.4%	13.3%	53.3%

* Some percentages do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding during calculation.

One respondent commented, “My husband was supportive and let me work as desired. He asked me if I was happy at this work. If I am happy, he will not stop me. He did not meddle in my work and he also was not angry. I was pregnant with my second child during the 2010 election. My mother was closely supportive.”³⁰ Another MP noted, “Surprisingly, my elder sister had a strong will for me to become a MP and encouraged me. My father stopped me only one time. He thought I should not do this as even Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was in and out of the jail many times. My husband encouraged me.”³¹

A number of the women no longer had living parents at the time they ran for office, and 19 were unmarried (of whom several were widows and divorcees). Nevertheless, with few exceptions, those women who were married and did have living parents tended to receive strong support from spouses and parents, with 37.8% of respondents reporting ‘very supportive’ parents and 35.6% reporting ‘very supportive’ spouses.

³⁰ Interview, MP3.

³¹ Interview, MP13.

The strongest opposition to women’s political engagement, however, also came from parents and relatives, of whom 8.9% of respondents indicated were ‘very unsupportive’ of their engagement in politics. A number of MPs noted that during the campaign, the disapproval of parents or close relatives created significant tension within the immediate or extended families. One respondent said, “My parents and siblings did not encourage me at all because their perception is that politics is not for women and I will be in jail if I enter into politics. My father became depressed and unhealthy. My mother thought I would leave the house after I become a MP and there would be no one left to take care of them.”³²

One respondent said, “My husband did not encourage me at the beginning as he thinks politics is not an easy job and the political situation is not stable. Later on, he became interested in politics and thinks it is good to be able to work for our region. My colleagues are also supportive.”³³

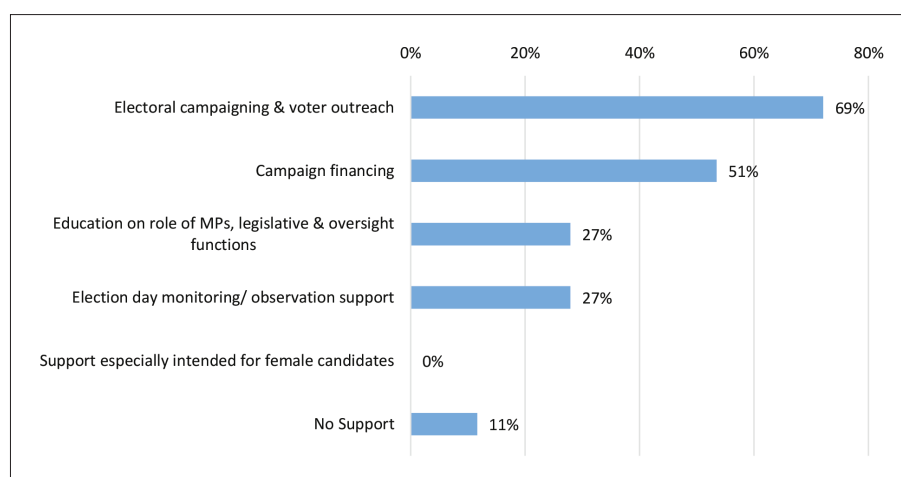
Co-workers and friends were reported by MPs to be mixed in their support of political ambitions. While 35.6% of women representatives reported ‘very supportive’ co-workers, 28.9% reported their co-workers to be ‘a little supportive’, and an additional 13.4% reported co-workers to be ‘not very supportive’ or ‘neither supportive nor unsupportive.’ Responses about the levels of support from friends were similarly mixed.

3.3 Institutional Support

Unsurprisingly, given the uncertain and restrictive political context in which elections were held in 2010, few political parties had significant resources to provide their candidates, much less conduct skills-based trainings. Domestic and international concerns about the elections meant that there was little support provided to the candidates through civil society organizations. As a result, there were major gaps in resources available to candidates at a time when those resources were sorely needed.

Generally, women candidates for parliament in 2010 reported receiving minimal information about their future roles as representatives to the national and state/region parliaments. While six women had previous election experience, having contested the 1990 general elections, most of the others lacked a pre-existing understanding of what accepting the nomination would entail. Many had been recruited to run for office by local community or party leaders, who provided little information about what candidates could expect. One MP recounted that she initially did not understand election laws, and her party did not even have copies of such procedures to offer her, “I did not know how to become a MP. There was not enough information. I had absolutely no idea. I asked information from a township-level election commission, but they did not have enough information. Since it was the first experience for all of us, it was very tiring.”³⁴

Figure 2: Types of Election-Related Support Provided to Women Candidates before the Elections, 2010 and 2012



³² Interview, MP14.

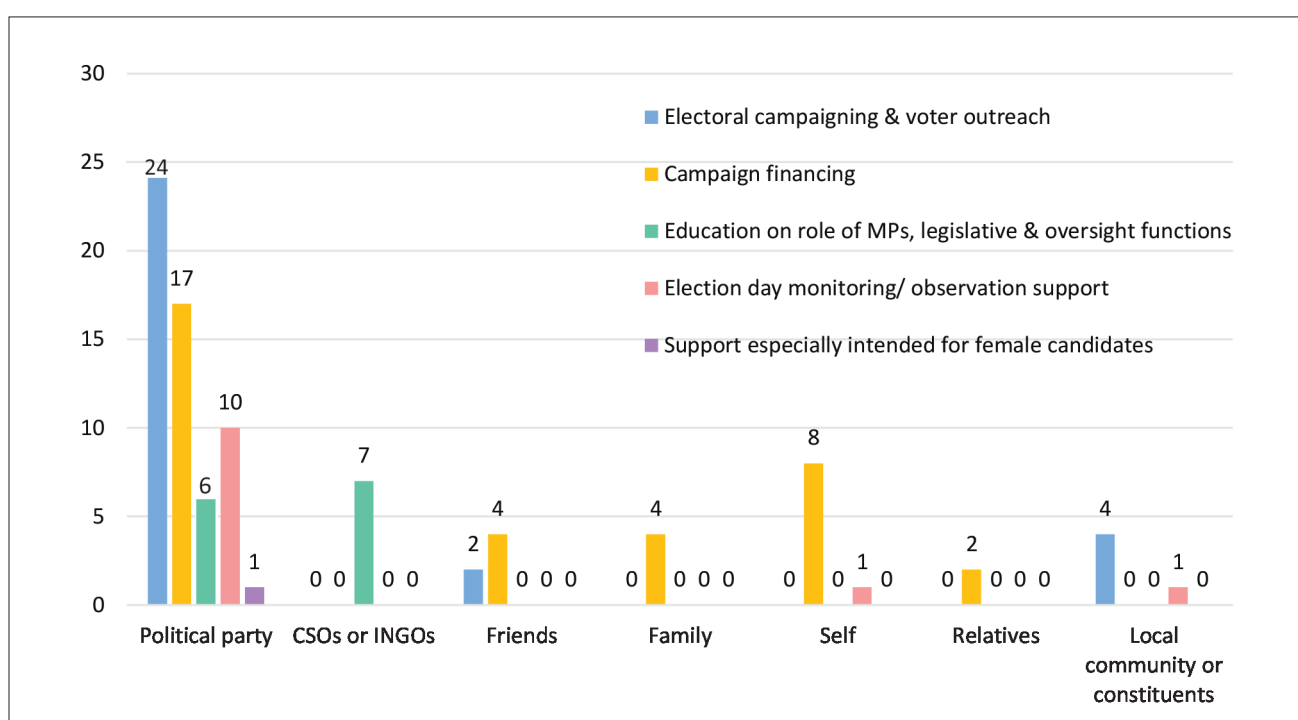
³³ Interview, MP27.

³⁴ Interview, MP24.

That said, political parties were cited as providing the most support to their candidates in the pre-election period, though that support was often limited and inconsistent. Sixty-nine percent of the women reported receiving support to conduct campaign activities and voter outreach, support which was provided almost exclusively by their parties. Interestingly, a handful of MPs also emphasized that they did not require much support from their parties in voter outreach and campaigning since they were well known within their community. In such instances, community members helped them carry the load with regard to voter outreach efforts.

Only 27% of the women said they received information before the elections about the role of MPs, and the responsibilities they would assume once elected. Only Six MPs (13%) said they received such information from their political parties, while seven (16%) were exposed to this information through workshops and information sessions held by CSOs and INGOs. However, it is worth noting that many parties, and not just in Myanmar, focus their efforts on training parliamentarians on their respective roles solely after elections.

Figure 3: Source of Campaign Support to Women Candidates, 2010 and 2012



Financing was a major challenge for most women, with only 40% indicating that they received some campaign financing from their political party. Eight women raised campaign funds from their friends and family, while another eight reported that they self-financed their campaigns.

On election day itself, likely constrained by a number of factors including limited human resources and the government's prohibition on independent election observation, political parties were unable to provide significant monitoring and observation support for their candidates. Only 27% of the women parliamentarians reported receiving election day monitoring or observation support, with that largely provided by their parties.

Not a single respondent reported receiving any support during the pre-election period specifically targeted to or designed to provide advice and training for female candidates. While this may be unsurprising, it is significant given the major challenges faced by women candidates within Myanmar's nascent democracy.

While not explicitly raised in the questionnaire as an area where political parties provided support, only a single MP mentioned the use of the media in her campaign. During the elections of 2010, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Censorship Board routinely and actively suppressed coverage in private and

state-run media outlets which it deemed as unfavorable to the ruling regime. This further encouraged media self-censorship in an environment where access for journalists to politicians was already difficult.³⁵ While the respondent's party provided no support for engaging the media, this candidate actively pursued coverage in the local media where she encountered considerable reluctance to write about women candidates. Nevertheless, she felt that the coverage she was able to secure significantly benefitted her successful campaign.

3.4 Campaign Challenges

A lack of information among the general public also contributed to the challenges faced by candidates on the campaign trail. Candidates frequently encountered voters who understood little about the elections and the voting process, and who had little exposure to the limited voter education and outreach efforts mounted by some of the political parties. This lack of information, and a general wariness toward the elections process as a whole, was particularly noted by candidates engaging with ethnic communities, suggesting a distance between national political developments and perceived government legitimacy in certain areas.

Candidates found that many voters were simply afraid of engaging in the electoral process, an understandable response to decades of authoritarian rule in which political activity was systematically persecuted. Public mistrust of the conduct of the elections and reluctance to engage in the political process contributed to an atmosphere of confusion, misinformation, and fear, which MPs reported was also deliberately stoked by some political parties for their own purposes.

Candidates also reported direct and indirect interference from local authorities and competing political parties. Several candidates reported feeling that the local elections authorities were biased against them during the campaign, while others were refused entry to polling stations as provided by law.

Many MPs reported accusations and criticisms from other political parties as key difficulties they faced during the campaign. Though the nature of these attacks was not always articulated by the respondents, it's clear in their reports that the political attacks often attempted to stoke public fears. Two MPs running in different states and regions with very different ethnic and religious populations, reported the use of religion in propaganda against them during their campaigns. In a troubling example from the 2010 campaign, one candidate faced propaganda claiming she was Muslim and that her election would lead to women in the community being taken by Muslim men.

The resulting campaign period was, as a practical matter, highly challenging for candidates to navigate. For example, on the campaign trail, many women candidates found it difficult to even secure lodging because locals distrusted the electoral process, candidates, and feared reprisal from local authorities.

These challenges were compounded by the gender of the candidates, and conservative societal expectations of appropriate behaviors of women significantly affected the experience of women on the campaign trail. Travel to remote areas to conduct voter outreach was difficult for all candidates given the country's geography, often inclement weather, and poor infrastructure. This was further compounded for women candidates because such travel necessitated additional security and the accompaniment of other people, requirements that had to be financed by the candidates themselves. One candidate noted that she could only meet voters in her constituency in the evenings after they returned from work, but that campaigning in the evenings was extremely difficult in villages without electricity, particularly as a woman.

Voters, especially other women, often questioned the propriety of women candidates traveling independently and engaging in political behavior. These experiences left an indelible impression on the women MPs once elected, as many ranked the relative lack of support from women voters as the most important obstacle preventing greater numbers of women from successfully entering politics.

³⁵ ALTSEAN-Burma 2010; Kean 2015.

Chapter 4: Life and Work as Parliamentarians

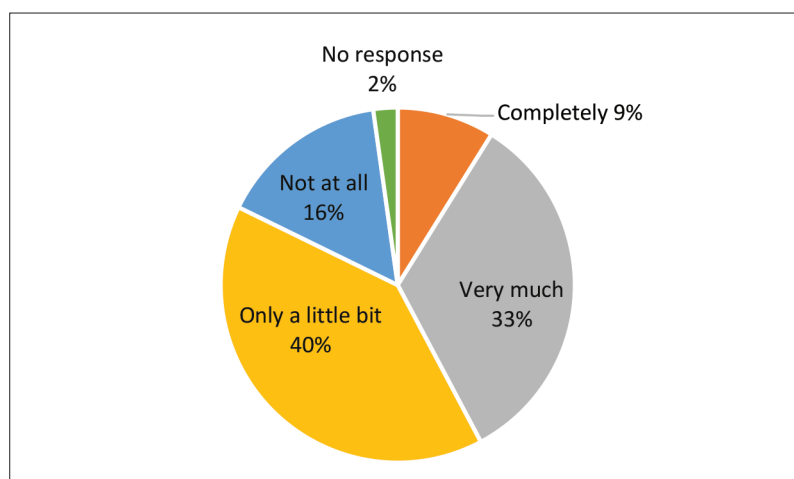
Women MPs emphasized significant shifts in the way they came to view their responsibilities to their constituents after the election, and most found it demanding but empowering. However, most would have preferred much stronger training in financial oversight and public speaking. An examination of the record suggests that women raised questions in parliamentary sessions as often as men, and the frequency of their questions increased by session. Slightly more than one quarter were involved in introducing new legislation. The women surveyed were most active on women's issues (57% very active), rural development (57% very active), and education (50% very active). When asked to share the top three concerns of their constituents, more than half of all respondents (51.5%) highlighted poverty. Women MPs sometimes felt overwhelmed with information, and yearned for staff assistance to help with the demands of research and travel. When asked directly about their experience of gender-based discrimination during their political careers, one-third of respondents indicated that they had faced such discrimination, although higher numbers discussed discrimination in personal interviews, including being excluded from male-dominated discussions on policy.

4.1 The Impact of Election on Female Representatives

Most women in the survey became parliamentarians without having a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities they would assume as elected representatives. Their experiences after the election appear diverse.

When asked in the initial questionnaire to describe the extent to which their lives had changed since taking office, 42% of respondents reported that their lives had changed 'completely' or 'very much.' Another 40% felt their lives changed 'only a little bit,' and 16% reported their lives had not changed at all.

Figure 4: How Much has Life Changed Since Becoming an MP



As these responses were more deeply explored in interviews, it became clear that changes were in fact quite dramatic for most women parliamentarians. MPs emphasized significant shifts in the way they came to view their responsibilities to their constituents, and their ability to act in response to community needs. Twenty-nine respondents (18 from the national level, and 11 from the state/region level) described feeling empowered to work on behalf of the public as the biggest change in their lives. Many representatives reported the newness of being able "to present the needs and demands of constituents in the parliament and implement some of the programs for the people,"³⁶ and to "hear the voice of people more, present their problems, and to be able to legislate the needs in the areas."³⁷

³⁶ MP9's response to questionnaire #14.

³⁷ MP16's response to questionnaire #14.

As they devoted more time to engaging with their constituents, representatives saw changes in how they were viewed by the community and how they viewed themselves. Representatives reported an increase in trust and respect from their family and social networks, as well as growing appreciation from their constituents for their work as parliamentarians. Interacting with members of parliament became normalized and interference from authorities decreased, leading more members of the public to feel that interacting with MPs was no longer dangerous behavior. Increasingly, MPs felt that they were seen to be listening to the needs of the community and advocating for resolution of local concerns.

Some respondents felt that they changed less than the world around them. “After becoming a MP, it is not me who changed. It is the environment/surroundings that change. The people and neighbors who would not dare to call me are now interacting with me. They accept me. It was me alone before.”³⁸ Other representatives recognized their role as change agents in their communities, characterizing their role as members of parliament as guiding, “people who had fear in the past to become courageous.”³⁹

The changes MPs experienced in their communities and social networks was generally seen as empowering, “My morale and spirit have been enhanced after becoming a MP. When I was working as a teacher, I could only think for my school. I am now thinking not only for my township, I think for my state, and even for a country. I feel encouraged and want to try harder. I become more confident.”⁴⁰ Another MP said, “I gain confidence and capability when I can work effectively for the benefit of people in my constituency and gain their trust and respect.”⁴¹

Several respondents saw the duties of office as compelling motivation for self-improvement. As one MP noted, “To be able to become someone who can truly represent people, I need to value people more than my wishes.”⁴² Another MP added, “No matter how high the position of a person is, if I’m doing the right thing, I dare to present about it in the parliament. I gained more self-confidence.”⁴³

Women from every economic and social stratum in Myanmar bear the predominant burden of domestic work and child-rearing.⁴⁴ Election to parliament rarely changed this gendered division of labor in the home. Several women in parliament expressed relief that their children were grown, which allowed them to dedicate more time and energy to their official duties without guilt. However, several women served in parliament at both the national and state/region levels while raising young children. A number of women interviewed noted that they still prepared meals for their families each morning before heading to parliamentary sessions and continued to be responsible for childcare and household chores in the evenings.

The impact of their work duties on family life and household responsibilities was more pronounced at the national level, but representatives at all levels expressed concern and guilt that work-related demands took a heavy toll on their families. One MP noted, “Rather than giving time to my family, I need to listen to the voice of constituents every time, and be ready to go to their place to fulfill their needs.”⁴⁵ Another MP was emphatic in saying that, “I can’t take care of my family matters. I can’t take care of my husband who is not in good health.”⁴⁶ Her sense of guilt regarding her family commitment was echoed by another peer, “I can’t work for my own business and have to ignore my two sons which has affected their education, health, and personal development.”⁴⁷

³⁸ Interview, MP31.

³⁹ MP14’s response to questionnaire #14.

⁴⁰ Interview, MP13.

⁴¹ MP19’s response to questionnaire #14.

⁴² MP7’s response to questionnaire #14.

⁴³ MP28’s response to questionnaire #14.

⁴⁴ The Gender Equality Network, 2015.

⁴⁵ MP6’s response to questionnaire #14.

⁴⁶ MP10’s response to questionnaire #14.

⁴⁷ MP14’s response to questionnaire #14.

4.2 Institutional Support

Substantive trainings were more available to women once they were elected, but their scope remained limited. The number of respondents who received capacity building training regarding the roles and responsibilities as MPs was 84% at the national level and 75% at the state/region level. More than two-thirds of all parliamentarians also indicated that they received capacity building on inclusive and gender-sensitive policy development.

Training and capacity development on other key technical skills was much more sporadic. Only half of the respondents reported receiving capacity building on planning and financial oversight functions, and even some of those who received such training felt it was inadequate. As one MP indicated:

We all do not know enough about national budget, financial plans, and projects. The trainings about finance and budget held by external organizations do not match with how the situation actually works in parliament. The way that retired local officers who used to work at the planning department explain things to us would have been more relevant to our country situation. Although I listened to international consultant/lecturer, it is not 100% helpful. They are not relevant to our country. What I have learned cannot be applied after the trainings. I do not attend those trainings anymore. It is a waste of time. I learn hard by myself.⁴⁸

This may well be the experience of all MPs regardless of gender given the nascent state of parliamentary development and related international support in Myanmar. Given the centrality of understanding budgets to influencing public policy, improving training for all MPs including women MPs in this area would be crucial moving forward.

Table 6: Support to Women in National and State/Region Parliaments⁴⁹

Type of Support	National	State/region
Capacity building on roles and responsibilities of MPs	84%	75%
Capacity building on researching and drafting legislation	68%	60%
Capacity building on planning and financial oversight	48%	50%
Capacity building on public speaking	20%	55%
Support for constituency engagement	56%	60%
Capacity building on inclusive and gender-sensitive policy development	72%	70%
Support especially for female MPs	44%	25%
Received no support	4%	0%

One-fifth of the national level MPs received training on public speaking and communications, compared to more than half of state and region MPs. Forty-four percent of the national MPs received support especially tailored for women MPs compared to 25% of their peers in the states and regions, with all of this training coming after their successful elections.

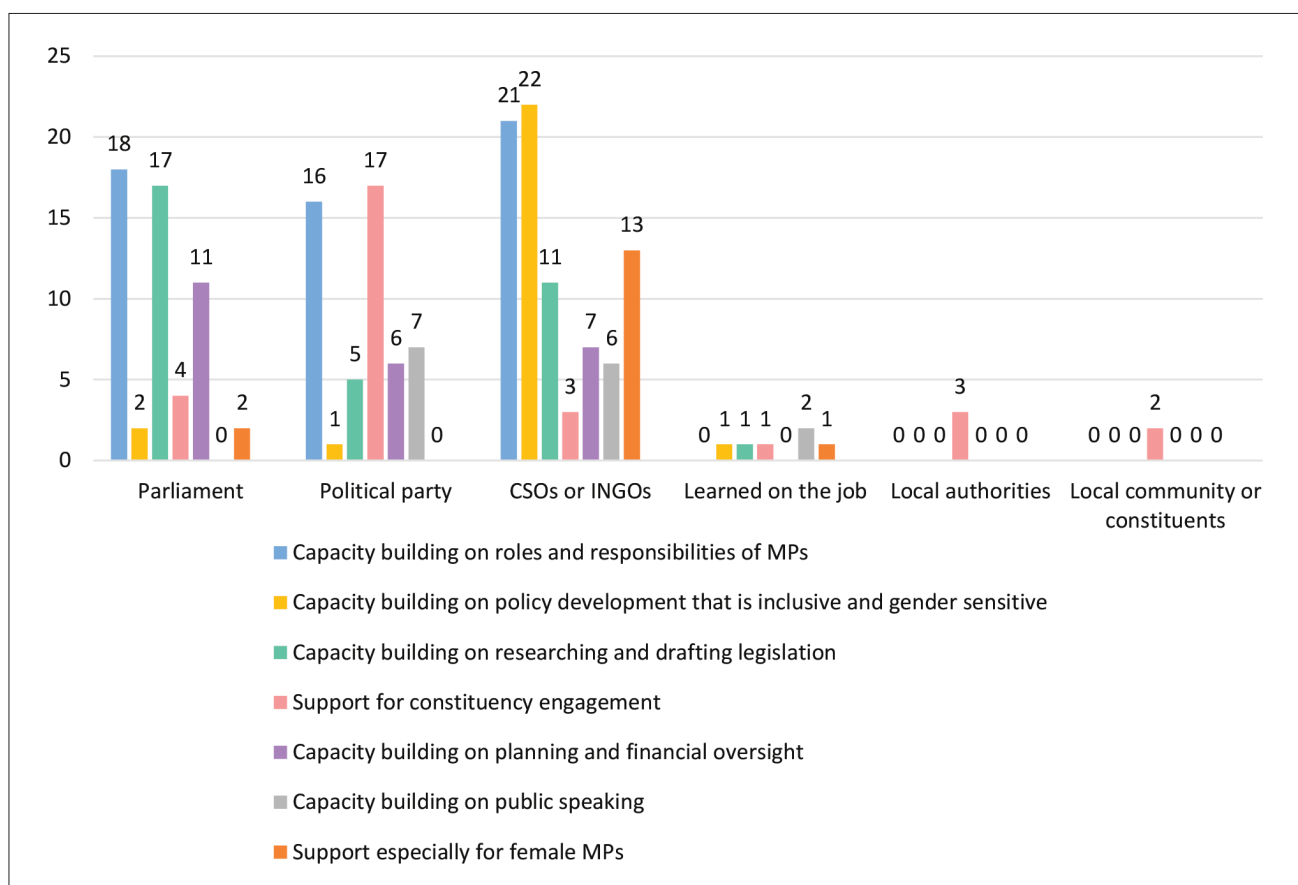
After the election, parliaments, CSOs and INGOs have played a more significant role in providing women MPs with support on various subjects in addition to their own learning on the job and some nominal assistance from local authorities and local communities in constituency outreach. Parliaments provided more technical

⁴⁸ Interview, MP1.

⁴⁹ 45 respondents.

skill-based capacity development on issues such as research, legislative drafting, planning, and finance. Political parties have played a critical role in supporting MPs with constituent engagement. CSOs and INGOs have focused more on gender-inclusive policy development programs for women MPs. CSOs and political parties have also offered some communications training in areas such as public speaking, although very few women indicated they had received such training. The desire for public speaking training was widely expressed among respondents, and they felt better public speaking skills would both boost their self-confidence and make them more effective when campaigning.

Figure 5: Who Provided Support in these Areas?⁵⁰



4.3 Women's Representation in Parliamentary Committees

At the national level, all elected women representatives belonged to at least one committee, although very few held leadership positions on such committees. The survey team was not able to collect information about leadership roles and committee membership at the subnational level parliaments. During interviews, some respondents identified a lack of confidence and technical skills as significant barriers that prevented them from wanting, or trying to, become committee chairs. A few reported that they were assigned to committees where their expertise and interests did not match the area of oversight (although this is a common complaint among many newly elected parliamentarians). Two women representatives were appointed as committee chairs; Daw Aung San Suu Kyi headed the Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee in the Pyithu Hluttaw, and Daw Khin Wine Kyi chaired the Education, Health, Women, and Children Affairs Committee in the Amyotha Hluttaw. Four women MPs held secretary positions, three in the Amyotha Hluttaw and one in the Pyithu Hluttaw⁵¹.

⁵⁰ 45 respondents.

⁵¹ See Annex 1 for a complete list of women MPs and their committee membership and positions in both houses of the national parliament.

4.4 Women's Engagement in Parliamentary Activities

One of the original objectives of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the obstacles women faced in their roles within the 2011 parliaments. As expected, women identified a myriad of practical skills which they felt could be strengthened but for which they received limited support: constituency engagement; facilitation; research; and planning and financial oversight. A lack of confidence, lack of education, and lack of experience were raised repeatedly throughout the survey responses as posing key obstacles to the entry of women into politics and to them thriving once engaged in politics.

An important observation that can be drawn from the survey responses, especially when considered in conjunction with other data collected about the activities of their male peers, is that by some measures women MPs engaged as actively in their roles as least as much as their male colleagues.

4.4.1 Raising Questions in Parliament

The process by which parliamentarians submit questions to government ministries was described by a number of national MPs as onerous and restrictive. Questions are required to be submitted ten days in advance of the session to the deputy director general of the parliament office. The speaker of the house may then, at his discretion, allow or refuse the submitted question. Those questions permitted to proceed are then transferred to the relevant ministry or department. Some queries may be answered publicly by the relevant ministry or department, while others are answered in writing and returned via the parliament office to the member. MPs have the discretion to request questions to be answered publicly (common referred to as “starred” questions) or privately, though each MP is allowed only ten starred questions per session.⁵² As of early 2015, the number of questions permitted was reduced to provide greater opportunity for questions submitted by military-appointed MPs. The procedures for submitting questions varied in state and region parliaments.

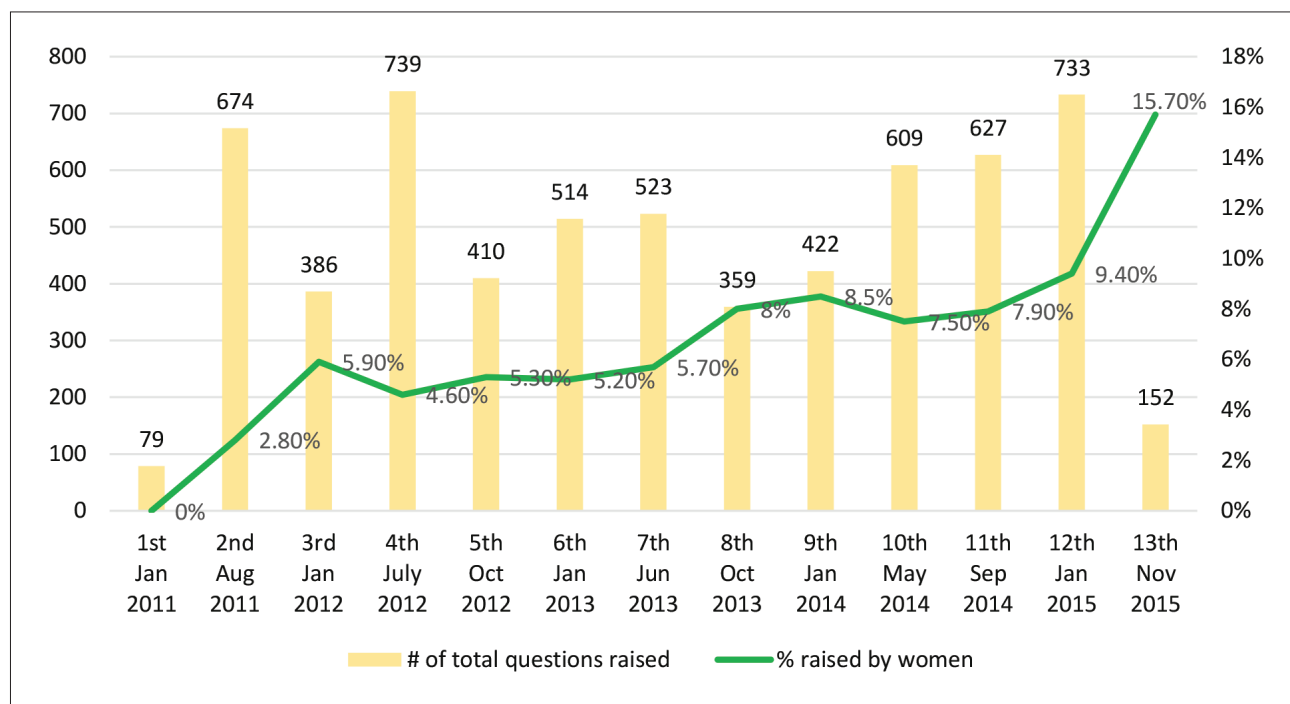
Examining the data provided by the Amyotha Hluttaw and the Pyithu Hluttaw of the Union Parliament covering all 13 sessions of the first parliamentary term 2011-2016, women MPs' performance varied between the two houses. In the Amyotha Hluttaw, there were 1,723 starred questions raised by all parliamentarians, with only seven questions (0.4%) raised by women MPs during the first parliament term. No starred questions were raised by women MPs in 8 of the 13 parliament sessions. Similarly, the number of sealed questions submitted by women MPs was much smaller compared to the number of questions submitted by their male colleagues. Out of 2,784 sealed questions, female MPs submitted 35 questions, or 1.3%, and there were no sealed questions submitted from them in the first, ninth, and thirteenth sessions.

Women MPs in the Pyithu Hluttaw were much more active. There were 4,504 starred questions raised by all parliamentarians with women generating 402 or 8.9% of the questions. No women MPs asked a question in the first session. From the 2nd session to the end of the first parliamentary term, the number of questions raised by women MPs steadily increased by session with women raising 69 questions by the 12th session. A very similar pattern can be found with sealed question where out of a total of 6,670 queries, women MPs submitted 590, or 8.9%.

Combining both data sets give us the whole picture of women MPs' level of participation in the Union Parliament. Out of a total of 6,227 starred questions raised by all parliamentarians, women MPs generated 409 questions or 6.6%. Out of a total of 9,454 sealed questions submitted by all parliaments, women MPs provided 590 questions or 6.2%. This level of participation corresponds to the to the proportion of women in parliament at the national level which is 6%. The proportion of women asking questions in parliament varied from session to session, but generally increased over the course of the parliament's tenure, reaching a high point in the last session for which data was compiled.

⁵² This description of the procedure by which questions may be submitted was drawn from the discussion with Union Parliament offices.

Figure 6: Starred Questions Raised by Women in National Parliament, 1st-13th Sessions



Source: Amyotha Hluttaw Office and Pyithu Hluttaw Office

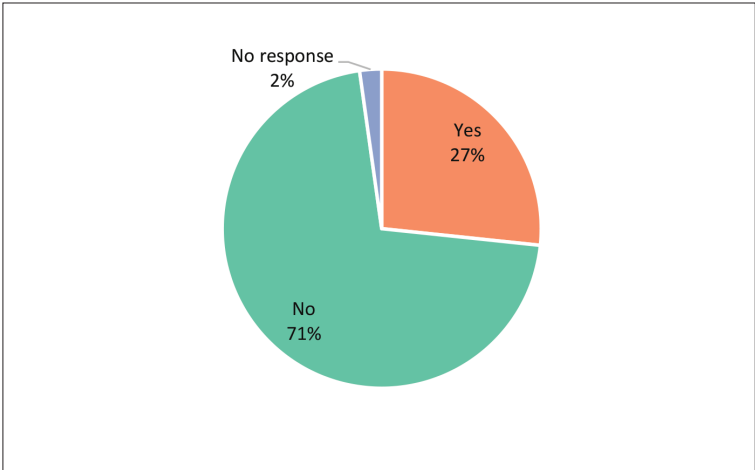
During in-depth interviews, some respondents felt that women received fewer opportunities to raise questions, although opinions varied regarding possible explanations. Parliamentary leadership retains the discretion as to which questions they will allow, and some MPs also suggested that the practice of political parties allocating questions raised by their members might also play a role. Whether male colleagues experienced similar constraints with regard to their ability to raise questions was outside the scope of this research.

4.4.2 Developing Legislation

About a quarter of total women MPs at both the national and state/region level parliaments indicated that they had initiated or introduced legislation during their tenure. When those who had not introduced legislation were asked why, a majority of women MPs said they felt that they lacked experience, legal expertise, or sufficient detailed understanding of the subject matter to engage in developing legislation. Several others reported that opportunities to become involved in the development of policy and drafting of legislation was often limited to party members with greater access to and better relationships with party leadership. Despite their efforts at crafting legislation responsive to constituent concerns, these representatives found themselves rebuffed by parliamentary colleagues both inside and outside of their party. One MP mentioned during an interview, “I personally think women MPs did not initiate or develop legislation because of limited experience. They may also be afraid of making mistakes.”⁵³

⁵³ Interview, MP20.

Figure 7: Have You Ever Introduced Legislation?⁵⁴

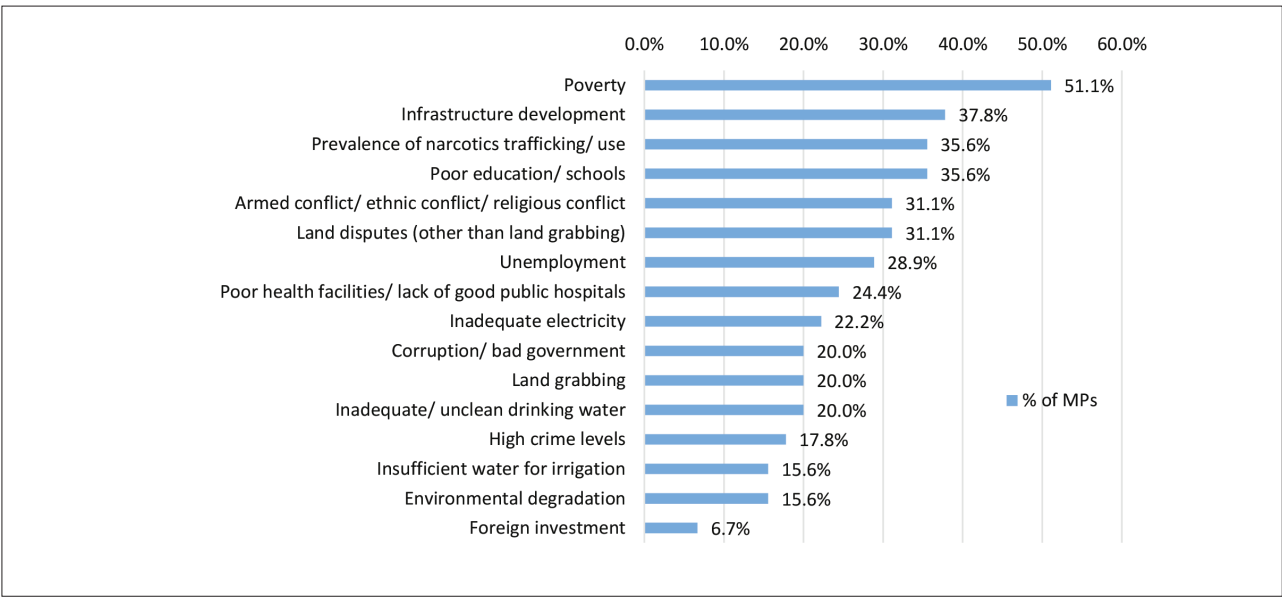


4.4.3 Constituent Engagement

Survey respondents seemed to feel considerable duty to address and resolve constituent concerns. As one woman MP noted, “Not only party members, but also people from the community, come to me to present their problems, ask for help and suggestion. Thus, I need to talk and listen to the needs of the community every day.”⁵⁵

When asked to share the top three concerns of their constituents, more than half of all respondents (51.5%) highlighted poverty, infrastructure development was mentioned by 37.8% of women representatives, followed by the use and trafficking of illegal drugs (35.6%) and education (35.6%). Conflict of various kinds, including ethnic and religious conflict, and land disputes other than land-grabbing, were also high on the list of constituent concerns, with nearly a third of respondents indicating the issues were of high concern to their constituents. Foreign investment, environmental degradation, and high crime levels were all seen as lower priorities.

Figure 8: What are the Top Three Concerns of Your Constituents? (Responses Pooled)

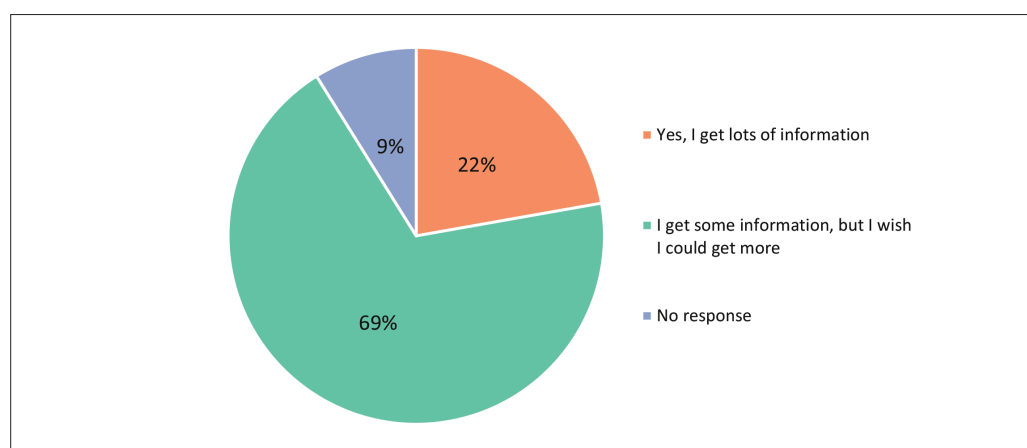


⁵⁴ 45 respondents.

⁵⁵ MP4’s response to questionnaire #14.

Though representatives indicated repeatedly that they spent substantial amounts of time meeting with constituents, most also indicated that they felt they needed more information to fully understand their needs. When asked whether they received enough information to understand constituent needs, 69% of respondents stated that while they received some information, they wished they had more. Twenty-two percent felt they received lots of information. Twenty-two percent felt they received lots of information.

Figure 9: Do You Receive Enough Information to Understand the Needs and Concerns of Your Constituents?⁵⁶



Female representatives overwhelmingly indicated that their information about constituent needs came directly from constituents. Seventy-eight percent of national level representatives, and 80% of state/region representatives received information directly from constituents ‘very often’ and ‘often’. Political parties were another major source of information about their constituents needs, with 68% of national MPs indicating they received information about constituent needs ‘very often’ or ‘often’ through the party. In contrast, only 50% of state/region representatives received information ‘very often’ or ‘often’ from their parties. A number of MPs also frequently got information about concerns of constituents from the media, and to a lesser degree from parliamentary colleagues.

National parliamentarians did not cite civil society organizations as a frequent source of information about constituent needs, with only 20% indicating they received information ‘very often’ or ‘often’. At the regional level, however, 45% of representatives indicated that CSOs ‘very often’ or ‘often’ provided such information.

Notably, at the state/region level, female representatives received information from family and friends (45% ‘very often’ and ‘often’) about the needs and concerns of constituents nearly as often as they received information from their political parties. State/region MPs also reported receiving information about constituent needs more frequently (40% ‘very often’ and ‘often’) from local township and village authorities than their colleagues at the national level (32% ‘very often’ and ‘often’). This perhaps reflects the fact that the female MPs in the states and regions are based in the community, and therefore likely to have more opportunities to interact with their constituencies and hear feedback from a wider range of sources – from political parties, NGOs, local authorities to friends and families.

⁵⁶ 45 respondents.

Figure 10: How Often do You Receive Information about the Needs and Concerns of Your Constituents from the Following Sources? National MPs⁵⁷

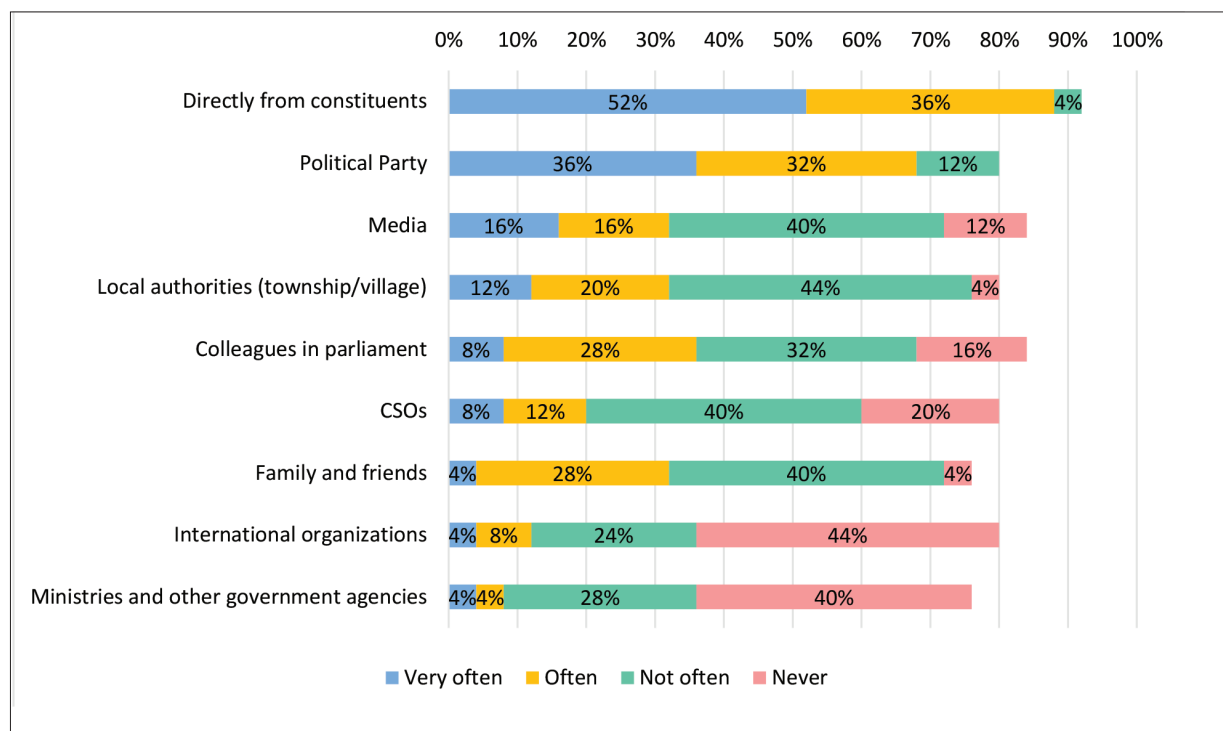
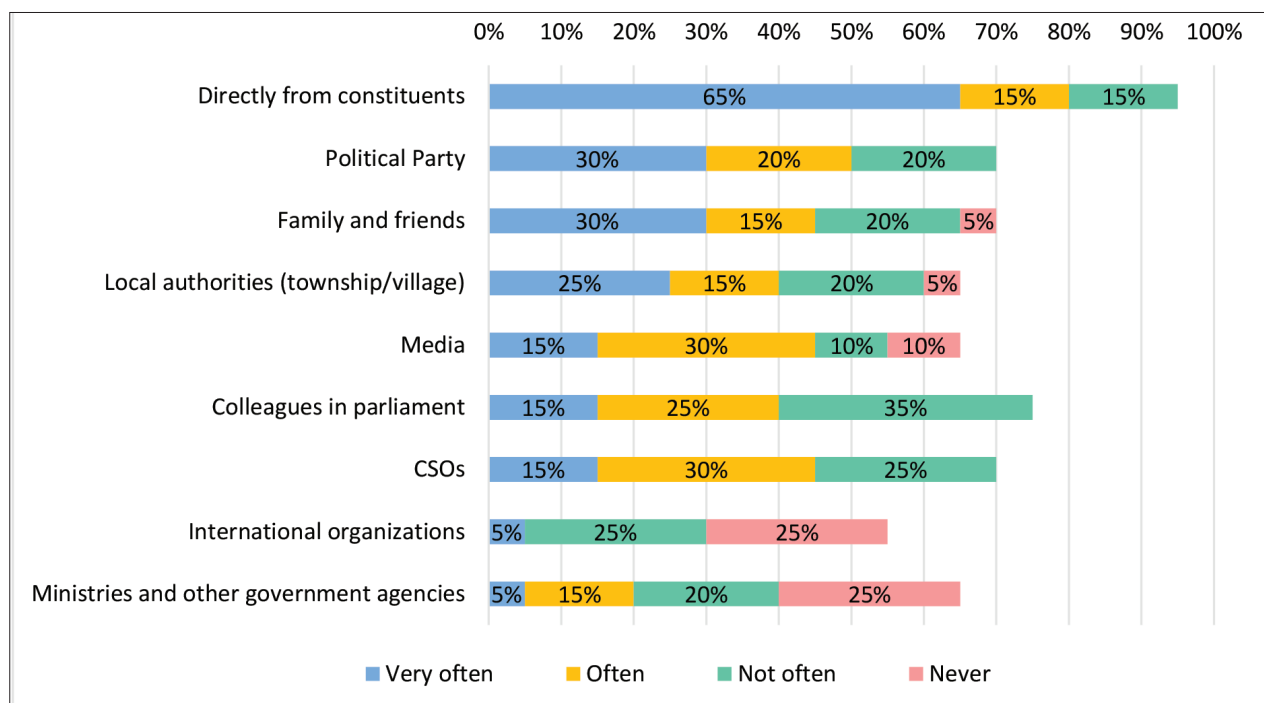


Figure 11: How Often do you Receive Information about the Needs and Concerns of Your Constituents from the Following Sources? State/Region MPs⁵⁸



Respondents reported varying degrees of engagement with local authorities in efforts to resolve community level problems. Some viewed effective working relationships with local officials as key to conflict resolution,

⁵⁷ 25 respondents.

⁵⁸ 20 respondents.

while others tended to view such officials as more of an obstacle than potential collaborator. As one MP noted, “I do not work with [local authorities] that often. When there are issues from my constituents, I just directly submit a case to the Parliament. But when there is a meeting about use of development fund, I meet with ward and township authorities. That’s all. I assume working with authorities takes time as they have layers of bureaucracy.”⁵⁹

In cases where representatives were able to build strong working relationships with local authorities, they felt it often led to quick results. As one respondent observed:

What I see is that there is a layer between citizen and local authorities. Most citizens do not want to talk directly with local authorities. So I act as a medium between them and am able to discuss and negotiate for the requests. So, it is pretty good. When I work with authorities, I am open to them. When I have things to tell them, I tell them. I do not submit all requests/issues directly to the parliament. I first discuss with the authorities to see which case should be submitted to the parliament. Since our side is open, they coordinate with us as much as they can. Some cases did not go well, but most cases did. So, I think we can say that this situation is not bad.⁶⁰

Another respondent observed, “The relation [with local authorities] is good. We collaborate. When the constituents report an issue, I call township level authorities and provide information. They then immediately take actions. I meet with city support committee, administration committee, and municipal officials two times a month, and let them know the situation and the needs. They instantly provide me an approval. For some issues, I do not need to ask questions at the Parliament session as it was already solved on the ground.”⁶¹

All of the survey respondents felt that more could be done to improve engagement with their constituents. Fifty-nine percent of respondents indicated that they received support for constituent engagement, mainly provided by political parties. When asked how constituent engagement might be improved, women in national and state/region parliaments clearly identified increasing opportunities for direct communication with constituents as essential, whether through public forums or more frequent travel to remote communities.

In conversations with the research team, a number of national representatives noted that the parliamentary schedule was often both uncertain and demanding, limiting their time to effectively interact with community members. Nevertheless, some resourceful representatives devised creative ways to meet with constituents even when parliament was in session. “Although I can’t go frequently to the constituency, I keep in touch with villagers when they come to the city for market every five days,” an approach that obviously only works with certain segments of a constituency in specific geographic areas.⁶² A few representatives identified engaging with CSOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), and similar groups as a possible way to improve understanding of constituent needs.

Some respondents, particularly those receiving information from parliamentary offices and international organizations, felt overwhelmed with information. Many indicated that they experienced difficulty culling the most useful information from the many reports, data, references, and evidence with which they were presented, and that it was challenging to translate such information into clear policy positions or presentations to their colleagues.

The findings suggest that a lack of information may be less of a problem for MPs than figuring out effective study techniques or strategies to synthesize information. The lack of any support staff that can help parliamentarians in gathering and understanding information needed for their work is also a significant challenge.

⁵⁹ Interview, MP20.

⁶⁰ Interview, MP35.

⁶¹ Interview, MP4.

⁶² MP10’s response to questionnaire #20.

4.5 Challenges and Constraints

4.5.1 Political Party Support and Limitation

The women surveyed represented twelve political parties (see Table 6) and the *Tatmadaw*, and their parties were the most significant source of support from their initial nomination, through the campaign, and during their tenure—particularly for constituent outreach and in providing skills-building opportunities. Given the newness of competitive politics in Myanmar, the uncertainty permeating the first several years of the transition to civilian government, and the lack of resources available for candidates and MPs, political parties were a source of crucial support.

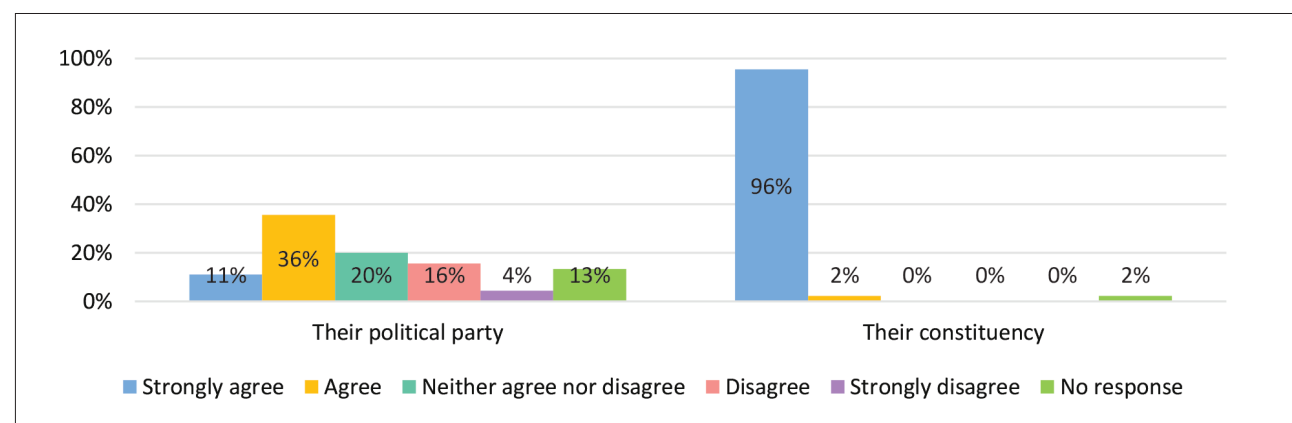
Table 7: Political Parties of Female Parliamentarians, 2013

Union	States and Regions
Union Solidarity and Development Party	Union Solidarity and Development Party
National League for Democracy	National League for Democracy
Shan Nationalities Democratic Party	Shan Nationalities Democratic Party
National Democratic Force	New National Democracy Party
Chin National Party	Lahu National Development Party
Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party	Democratic Party (Myanmar)
All Mon Regions Democracy Party	Independent
Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State	
Rakhine Nationalities Development Party	

Source: Women in Parliament 2014 (Phan Tee Eain & The Gender Equality Network, 10 April 2013)

At the same time, responses suggest that women MPs also often felt constrained by their own party policies or directives, and that their individual views were often unwelcome or irrelevant in the face of party priorities.

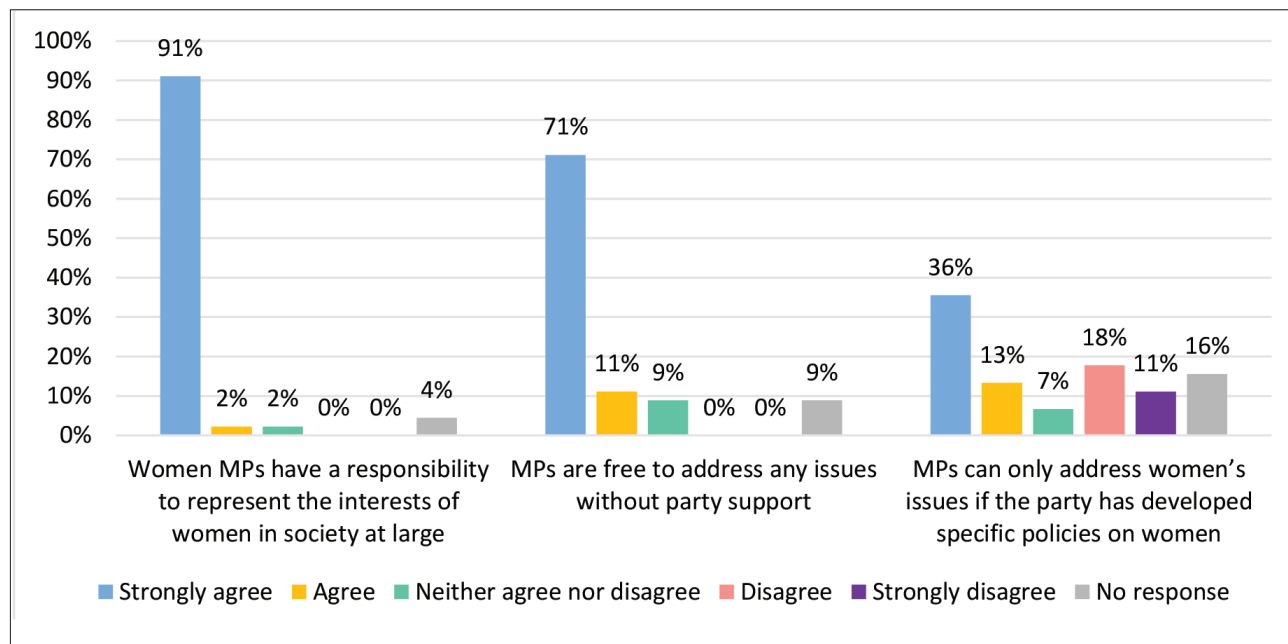
Figure 12: Agree/Disagree: MPs are Accountable First and Foremost to:



Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they felt first and foremost obligated to represent the interests of their constituency. Indeed, none of the female representatives surveyed disagreed with the statement that MPs were accountable first to their constituencies, and 96% strongly agreed with the statement. Eleven percent of respondents strongly agreed that MPs are accountable first and foremost to their political party,

and an additional 36% agreed, reflecting perhaps a tension between the representatives' sense of duty to their constituents and duty to their parties. Only 20% of respondents indicated they disagreed or strongly disagreed that MPs were foremost accountable to their political parties.

Figure 13: To What Extent do you Agree/Disagree with the Following Statements?*



**Some percentages do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding during calculation.*

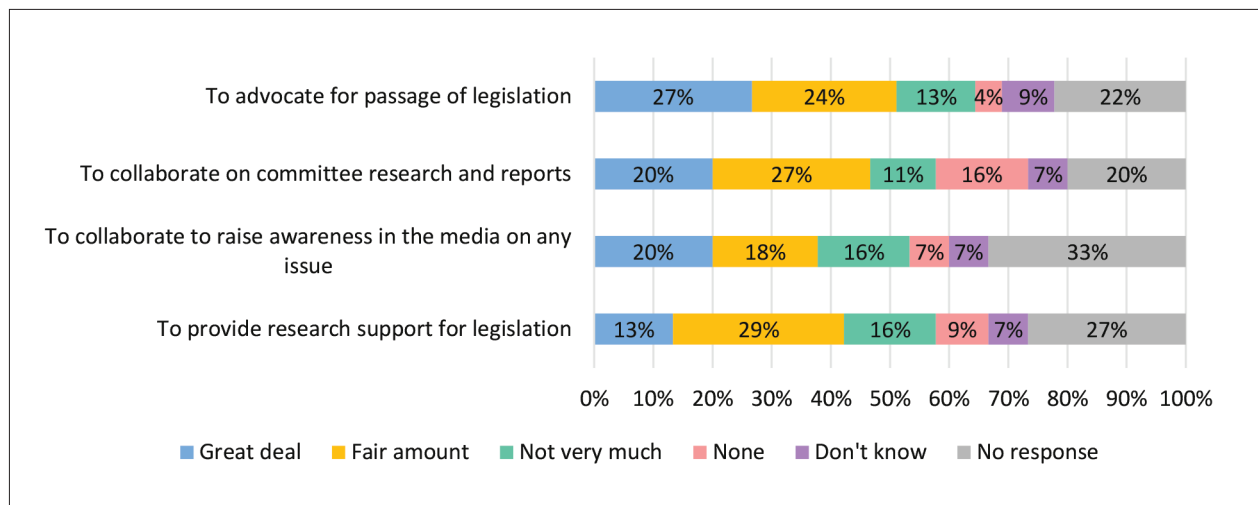
Women in parliament appeared to feel a great deal of responsibility to broadly represent the interests of women. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed with the statement, 'Women MPs have a responsibility to represent the interests of women in society,' with 91% agreeing strongly, 2% agreeing, and no respondents indicating disagreement.

However, responses to other questions suggest this obligation to constituents and women could sometimes be found at cross-purposes with party interests. While 71% of respondents agreed strongly, and 11% agreed, with the statement that representatives are free address issues regardless of party support, almost half of all respondents (49%) agreed strongly or somewhat that MPs could only address women's issues if the party had developed specific policies to do so. Notably, 29% of respondents expressed disagreement with the idea that MPs could only address issues on which their party had developed relevant policy, and 23% of respondents (7% 'neither agree nor disagree' and 16% 'no response') expressed no opinion on the statement.

4.5.2 Collaboration among Women MPs

Collaboration between women in parliament occurred most frequently among women who shared a party. Respondents most frequently collaborated with women from within their own parties to advocate for the passage of legislation, with 51% indicating they worked with other women in their parties a 'great deal' or a 'fair amount.' Forty-seven percent worked with other women in their parties on committee research, and 42% collaborated on research to support the development of legislation.

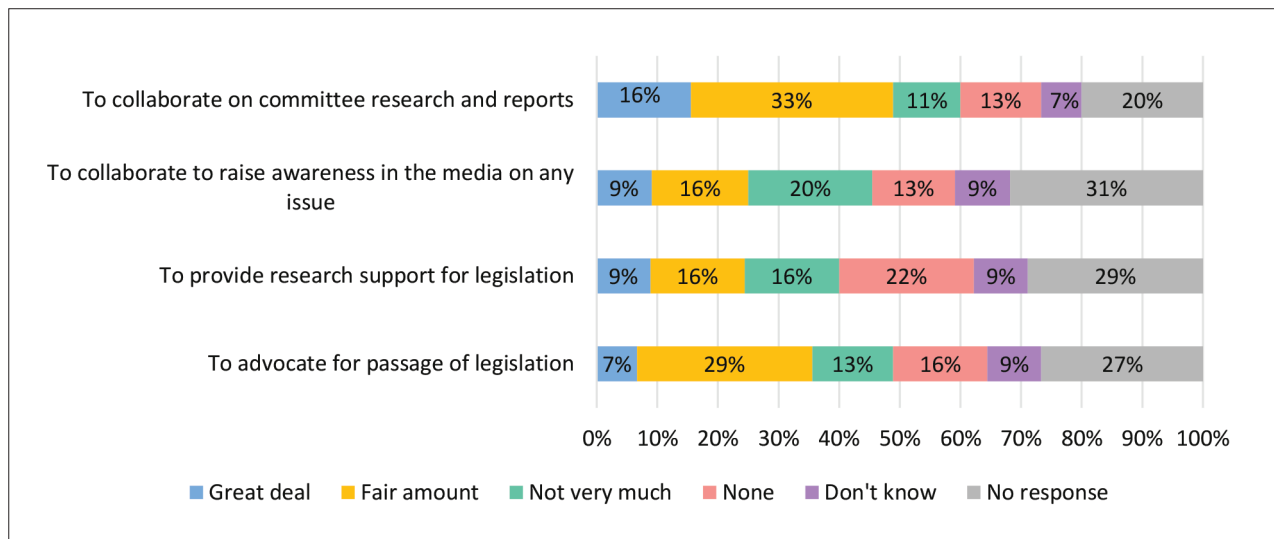
Figure 14: How often do Women Parliamentarians Collaborate on the Following Issues with Women from their own Parties?^{63*}



**Some percentages do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding during calculation*

Committee assignments seemed to provide the primary opportunity for women to work with women from other parties. Nearly half of the respondents (49%) indicated that they collaborated with women from other parties on committee research and reporting (16% ‘great deal’ and 33% a ‘fair amount’). Very little collaboration with other women across party lines occurred toward developing legislation or awareness raising in the media. Collaboration with other women within or outside of their own political parties was impossible for a few respondents, given that they were either the sole female representative within their party or within their house of parliament.

Figure 15: How often do Women Parliamentarians Collaborate on the Following Issues with Women from other Parties?^{64*}



**Some percentages do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding during calculation.*

Given the relatively small number of women representatives who served in the national and state/region parliaments from 2011 to 2016, it was not possible to determine whether the experiences of collaboration

⁶³ 45 respondents.

⁶⁴ 45 respondents.

across party lines reflected broader trends absent gender. However, increasing opportunities for women to connect to and engage meaningfully with other women, especially across party lines, clearly facilitates the development of professional support networks and the collective power to advance shared interests. As one respondent noted, “Women should cooperate with each other. Women should be involved in the decision-making process. They need to think that they can do it.”⁶⁵ As the numbers of women in parliamentary bodies across Myanmar grows, the willingness of political parties to encourage collaboration across party lines will have significant implications not only for the parliamentary system as a whole, but for the evolution of women’s political power.

4.5.3 Resource and Capacity Needs

Many MPs highlighted financial constraints as one of the biggest challenges preventing them from performing their role as an MP effectively and efficiently. Almost all of the respondents expressed the importance of an MPs’ financial independence. One respondent stated in an interview, “If there is a financial constraint, I cannot do anything. Support from others is temporary. I need to be financially strong.”⁶⁶ Some expressed support for a pay raise, feeling that their current parliamentary salaries were insufficient to cover required expenses such as office rent, transportation to and from their constituencies, and the costs associated with assisting constituents. However, in April 2015, the salaries of MPs increased substantially.

The survey found that only a few MPs were able to rent an office space with their own money. Many MPs utilized their homes as an office, while others shared space in party offices. When asked where they usually met with constituents, answers varied, and ranged from meetings in homes to tea shops and restaurants. Many respondents hoped they would be able to secure office space so that they could carry out their duties in a more professional manner.

Some MPs stressed that the transportation costs to visit constituencies were higher than most imagined. Some parts of constituencies were far flung or unsafe for solo travel by a woman, especially during the rainy season. There were additional expenses such as transportation, accommodation, and food if an MP was forced to be accompanied by another person during such travel, as women frequently were. One respondent highlighted, “Money is the key. When I visit my constituency, I need to spend money for transportation and food so that other people can come with me. The more villages I go to, the more money it will cost.”⁶⁷

The respondents explained that not having skilled office staff or a research assistants was another key challenge. They repeatedly mentioned the utility of a potential staffer with computer literacy skills who could assist them with research and travel with them to constituencies. The interview portion of the survey indicated that most of the women MPs lack sufficient research skills and computer literacy. Some women parliamentarians at the national level cited receiving assistance from local staff working at international organizations for typing documents in Burmese, or assisting with photocopying and basic research needs. This was seen by respondents as helpful but insufficient, and most felt that a skilled assistant would go a considerable way toward resolving their day-to-day difficulties.

According to respondents, several political parties have research units, but the quality and capacity of these research units varied greatly from party to party, and most are not designed to support the individual research needs of MPs.

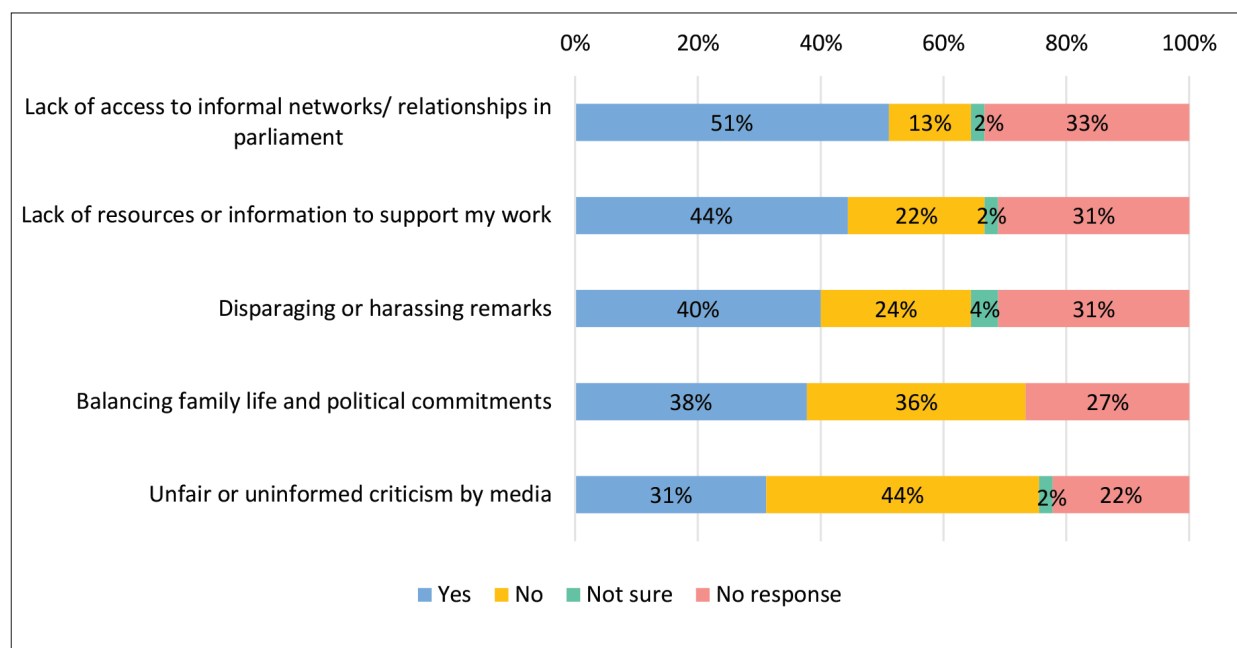
When asked specifically about the difficulties they faced as MPs, respondents pointed to the lack of access to informal networks and/or relationships in parliament (51%), a lack of resources or information (44%), and being subjected to disparaging or harassing remarks (40%). The challenge of balancing family life and political commitment was cited by 38% of respondents, but almost as many, 36%, said that they did not feel that to be a problem.

⁶⁵ Interview, MP14.

⁶⁶ Interview, MP1.

⁶⁷ Interview, MP28.

Figure 16: Have You Faced any of the Following Difficulties as an MP?⁶⁸ *

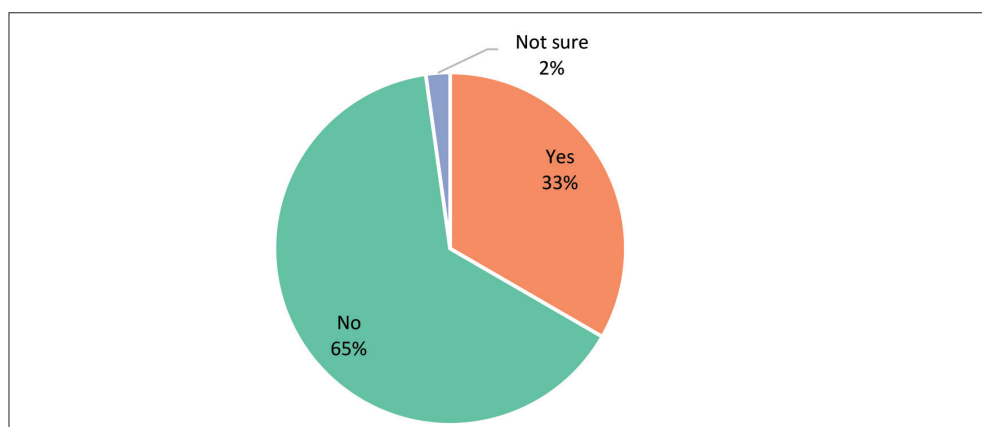


*Some percentages do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding during calculation.

4.5.4 Discrimination

When asked directly about their experience of gender-based discrimination during their political careers, one-third of respondents (33%) indicated that they had faced such discrimination. While this might seem to be a relatively low figure, it needs to be taken in context. Myanmar continues to face widespread entrenched societal bias against women generally, and especially women in positions of leadership.⁶⁹ When representatives were later interviewed in depth, it became clear that the MPs' understanding of what kinds of behavior constituted evidence of discrimination was markedly different from researchers' assumptions at the time the questionnaire was developed.

Figure 17: Have You Personally Experienced Gender-Based Discrimination in Your Political Career?⁷⁰



Women who indicated they had experienced discrimination in their political careers raised specific incidents of disrespect or verbal abuse which they felt their male peers would not have been subject to, especially from

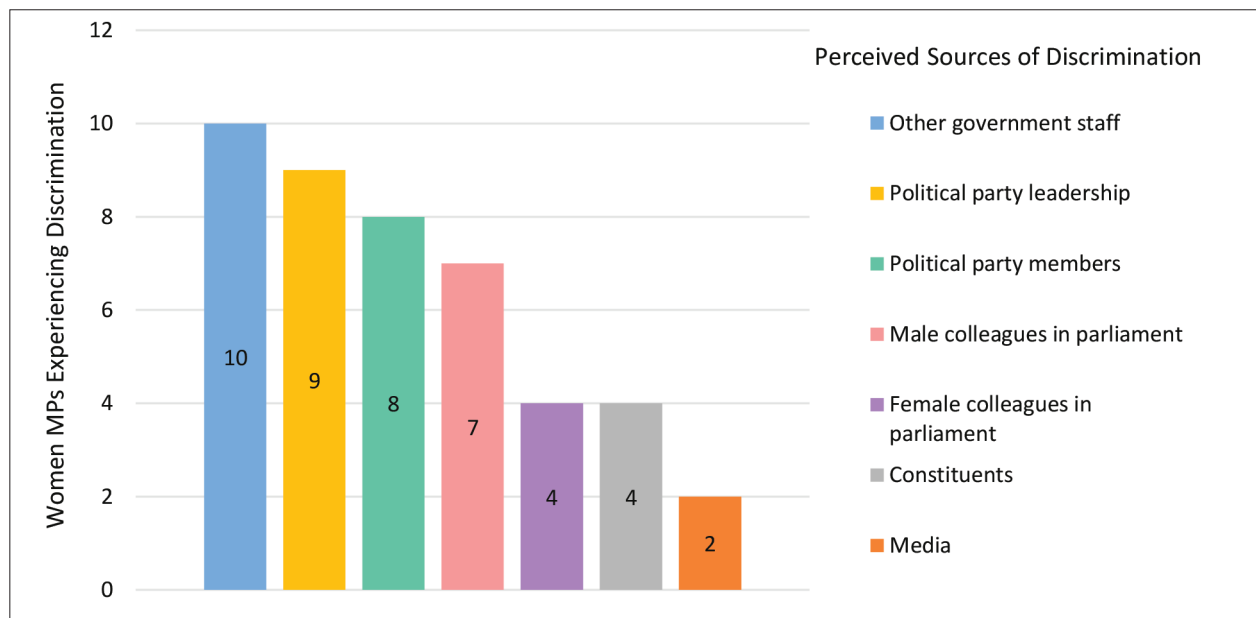
⁶⁸ 45 respondents.

⁶⁹ The Gender Equality Network, 2015.

⁷⁰ 45 respondents.

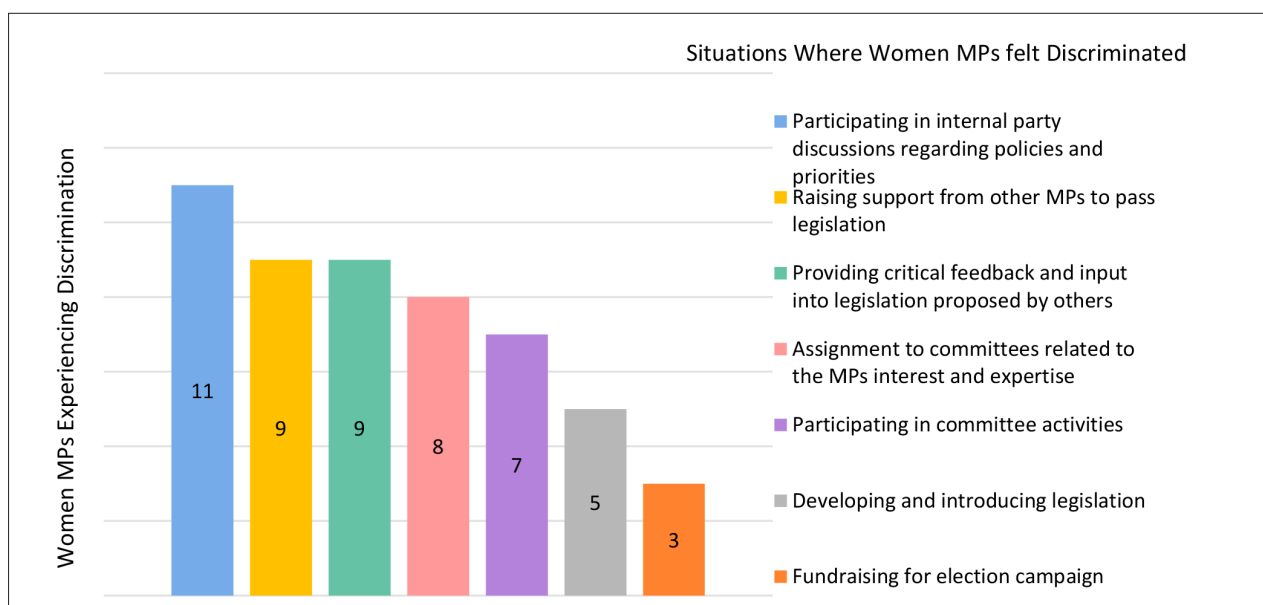
government employees – ranging from ministry staff to local authorities. Respondents also indicated that they felt their opinions and experiences were often undervalued or ignored by party leaders and colleagues in parliament.

Figure 18: Discrimination by Whom? Incidents by Category



Many representatives who had not indicated experiencing discrimination in the written surveys described being treated differently than men in their interviews. This suggests the depth to which gender norms influence the behavior of women politicians in Myanmar, with women often self-enforcing their own marginalization. Women described being excluded from male-dominated discussions on policy, whether during party meetings or informal gatherings of male MPs at local restaurants or drinking establishments.

Figure 19: Discrimination in Which Situations?



One female parliamentarian suggested that it would be inappropriate for the women MPs themselves to join male colleagues at restaurants for informal meetings, while others said they simply could not make time to join because of their household and child care obligations. One respondent noted, “Yes, there is some discrimination. When there is a committee member, I am not usually given an opportunity to provide my opinions. The committee chairman asks the elders. They do not ask me, and I am not on their priority list. They look down on me a little. I am the one who wants to participate in the discussion but they ask others, not me. I feel bad.”⁷¹

Another MP added, “There is no discrimination against women in parliament. However, when there were study tours, mostly men joined, and only a few women parliamentarians joined.”⁷² Women described their male colleagues addressing women on the floor of parliament and in party meetings with patronizing language. Rather than using honorifics, some men referred to women as ‘little sisters.’ A number of women described not feeling free to leave sessions of parliament to use the restroom out of respect for their seated male colleagues, who feared touching the female representatives’ *longyis* as they passed. However, it is important to note that women MPs often did not identify these behaviors in a negative light. For example, some of the women felt that being addressed informally as ‘little sister’ was done more affectionately than discriminatorily.

⁷¹ Interview, MP14.

⁷² Interview, MP31.

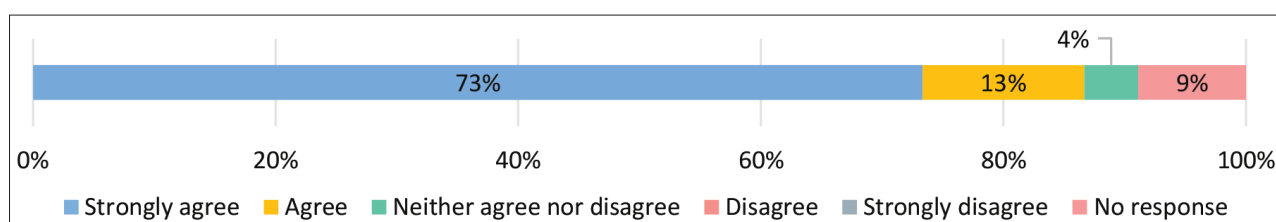
Chapter 5: Reflections on Increasing Women's Political Participation

Public opinion polls and qualitative research demonstrate that a strong public bias against women in positions of leadership remains, and against women's engagement in politics specifically. Eighty-two percent of respondents felt that lack of support from other women 'very much' prevented women from entering politics, while only 51% of respondents felt that lack of support from male voters was an equally significant obstacle. Yet, female representatives felt that increasing men's engagement and support for gender equality was the most effective way to increase the number of women in politics. In ranking a lack of confidence, a lack of education, and the lack of financing so highly among obstacles faced by women politicians, many of these MPs may be making a significant observation about their own experiences.

Although the overwhelming victory of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's party in the 2015 elections could lead some to suggest that claims of bias against women in public office are overblown in Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi remains a unique historical figure in the country.

Public opinion polls and qualitative research have shown clearly that there is strong public bias against women in positions of leadership, and against women's engagement in politics specifically.⁷³ Without question, Aung San Suu Kyi's elevation to power has potential to pave the way for many other women leaders to come, but it still comes against a backdrop of societal attitudes that are deeply entrenched and that will not fade quickly.

Figure 20: Agree/Disagree: Women and Men Should have Equal Roles in Government^{74*}



**Some percentages do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding during calculation.*

Nearly all female representatives surveyed agreed with the statement, "Women and men should have an equal role in running the government," with 86% of them agreeing strongly or somewhat. Several women (4%) either indicated neither agreement nor disagreement, and another 9% declined to respond.

Interestingly, MPs identified the lack of support from fellow women voters as the greatest obstacle preventing more women from entering politics. Eighty-two percent of respondents felt that lack of support from other women 'very much' prevented women from entering politics, while only 51% of respondents felt that lack of support from male voters was an equally significant obstacle. An additional 11% felt that lack of women's support prevented entry a 'fair amount.' Given that the same high percentage of 75% of both men and women believe that men make better political leaders than women as uncovered in The Asia Foundation's 2014 civic knowledge and values survey, the women MPs' more acute sense of the lack of support from other women underscores how women's deeply internalized view about gender equality can greatly impact women pursuing political life.

Respondents also felt very strongly that women's own lack of confidence posed a significant barrier to entering politics (80% 'very much'; 7% 'fair amount'). A lack of education (62% 'very much'; 29% 'fair amount') and lack of financing (62% 'very much'; 24% 'fair amount') were also considered substantial obstacles.

⁷³ The Asia Foundation, 2014; Asian Barometer Survey, 2015; Löfving, 2011.

⁷⁴ 45 respondents.

Table 8: Perceived Obstacles Preventing Women from Entering Politics^{75*}

	Very much	Fair Amount	Not very much	Not at all	Don't know	No response
Lack of support from female voters	82%	11%	2%	0%	0%	4%
Lack of confidence	80%	7%	0%	0%	0%	13%
Lack of education	62%	29%	2%	0%	0%	7%
Lack of finances	62%	24%	4%	0%	2%	7%
Lack of support from family (parents, spouse)	58%	31%	2%	2%	0%	7%
Prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the roles of women in society	58%	20%	11%	2%	0%	9%
Lack of support from political parties	53%	27%	9%	0%	4%	7%
Lack of support from male voters	51%	27%	7%	0%	0%	16%
Lack of experience with representative functions: public speaking, constituency relations	40%	47%	7%	0%	0%	7%
Politics seen as dangerous, dirty or corrupt	29%	22%	16%	11%	2%	20%
Lack of support from other relatives	29%	27%	24%	2%	0%	18%
Religion	24%	38%	16%	11%	0%	11%
Security concerns	20%	49%	11%	2%	2%	16%
Domestic responsibilities	18%	58%	13%	0%	0%	11%

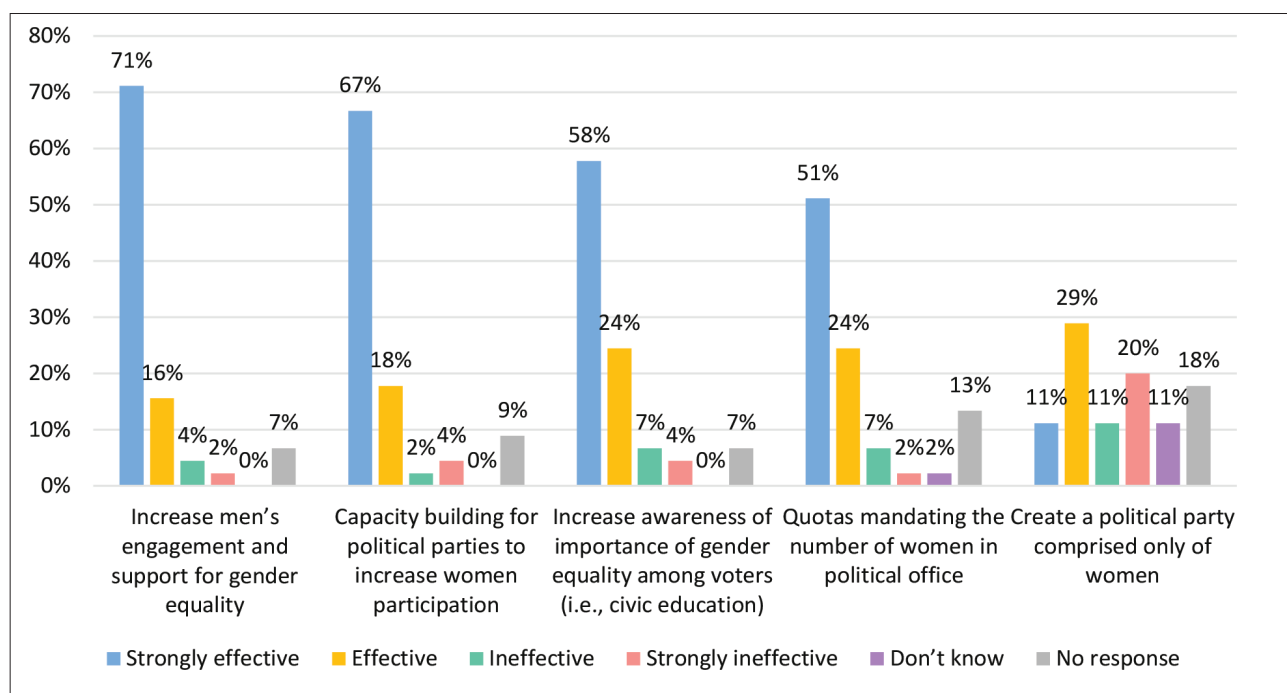
**Some percentages do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding during calculation.*

Deeply held societal values and gendered norms in Myanmar about the behavior and value of women are not only engrained in the general public, but also among women – much to the detriment of women aspiring to political careers. And while women frequently cited a lack of confidence in their own abilities, analysis of the data makes clear that women MPs at both the national and state/region level were at least as, if not more, qualified than their male colleagues.

In ranking a lack of confidence, a lack of education, and the lack of financing so highly among obstacles faced by women politicians, many of these MPs may be making a significant observation about their own experiences. Many female representatives perceive themselves as being less qualified than they actually are, a perception unfortunately reinforced by the lack of respect and trust afforded to women in positions of leadership by the society.

⁷⁵ 45 respondents.

Figure 21: Effectiveness of Different Activities in Increasing the Number of Women in Politics?⁷⁶



The survey was not able to probe further the women MPs' view on female voters, which they identified strongly as the biggest challenge to women entering politics, but increasing men's engagement and support for gender equality was viewed by 71% as the most effective way to increase the number of women in politics. This was closely followed by building capacity of political parties to promote women's inclusion and participation (67%), which reflects the crucial role they play in the political life of MPs.

Representatives were somewhat less enthusiastic but still felt strongly about the efficacy of campaigns to raise awareness among the voting public (58%) and the oft-discussed use of quotas mandating the number of women in political office (51%). Women were significantly less inclined to believe that the formation of an all-women political party could be effective in improving the participation of women in politics, with only 11% believing such an initiative would be strongly effective and 29% believing it would be effective. The October 2015 formation of the Women's Party in Mon State was the first example of an all-women's party in Myanmar in modern times. While the party was able to field only four candidates for national level constituencies in Mon State, and none were ultimately elected, Mon State saw a dramatic increase in the proportion of women elected to both the national and regional parliaments.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ 45 respondents.

⁷⁷ In the 2011-2016 term, Mon State had one female representative in the Amyotha Hluttaw, three in the Pyithu Hluttaw, and no women in its regional parliament. In November 2015, three women were elected to the Amyotha Hluttaw, three to the Pyithu Hluttaw, and five to the Mon State Hluttaw. Most significantly, in February 2016, a woman was elected as Speaker of the Mon State Hluttaw.

Stories from the Frontlines: Women Parliamentarians and their Constituencies

Although most women representatives came to their elected positions with little understanding of their roles and responsibilities as members of parliament, many became active and developed strategies they feel made them effective in meeting the specific needs of their constituencies. Below are some of the stories from the front line that the women MPs shared with the research team.

“The villagers could not afford to buy water pipes. I went down to check the water source and found that water was there but it was far from their villages. I purchased water pipes with constituency development funds provided by the government for all villages. Fifteen villages now have access to water which is quite clean and even better than water we have here. I am so happy to see that they now have access to water.”⁷⁸

“I am pleased that I was able to protect Mandalay city from a potential fire. At that time, they were in the process of opening a gas/petrol station on 26th Street. There are many warehouses around that area and it is dangerous. NGOs and local people were ready to go on the streets and protest against this gas station. They came and talked to me about it. I asked them to hold the protest and report this case to the parliament. This gas station project was stopped and the case was closed. No one was detained and no protest happened. I am very happy about it.”⁷⁹

“There was a social religion problem in Rakhine, and I received a letter about attempts to destroy a mosque there. I instantly knew that it was going to be bad for my constituency where there is a large Muslim population. I reached out to NLD party members at the ward level and called for a meeting to form a conflict resolution team consisting of Buddhists and Muslims. After the team was established, I went to see Buddhist monks and Muslim religious leaders and requested them to stabilize the situation as needed. I warned the people not to go out on the streets if possible and provided my contact numbers. My team and I took watch duty day and night. Because of all the precautionary security matters, no one went out to protest and did not start any unrest. I see this case as a success.”⁸⁰

“We have the Ahttayan Bridge across the Thanlwin River which was constructed only for cars. There were many accidents because the motorbikes were also using the bridge. I received letters and phone calls about this problem. I submitted a letter to an official at the construction department at the state level responsible for the bridge. I asked if the construction department could repair this bridge so that it can be used by both cars and motorbikes. It took about two months, and it is now done.”⁸¹

“Because of illegal gold panning in the Ayeyarwady River, the cliff collapsed and some villages of Shan ethnic people needed to move out. In 2011, I pushed for a stop of gold panning there and it was successful.”

“The army confiscated land in my constituency and I helped those landowners to regain 700 acres of land even though it was not listed as confiscated land. I helped to solve the difficulties of the people.”⁸²

⁷⁸ Interview, MP4.

⁷⁹ Interview, MP20.

⁸⁰ Interview, MP35.

⁸¹ Interview, MP30.

⁸² MP22's response to questionnaire #29.

Chapter 6: The Future for Women in Myanmar's Parliaments

The 2015 general election brought a dramatic increase in both the number of women who contested seats and the number of women elected to office. Women's representation was consolidated into fewer political parties with the vast majority of women in the NLD. The most consistent theme running through the recommendations of women parliamentarians in this study was to be prepared, persistent, and open to learning and working with others, as well as building trust. Finding programmatic ways to build that sense of trust in oneself may well be pivotal to the future of women in Myanmar's governance.

6.1 Profile of Women Parliamentarians, 2016-2021

The 2015 general elections heralded a new era for governance in Myanmar, ushering into office popularly elected members of parliament who carry with them considerable hopes and expectations. These elections brought a dramatic increase in both in the number of women who contested seats and the number of women elected to office. The availability of information on candidates provided by the Union Election Commission of Myanmar for the 2015 elections makes it possible to provide a much more detailed profile of the women parliamentarians of the 2016-2021 term, as well as some comparisons between the two generations of female parliamentarians.

There is an increased in female candidates in the 2015 general elections and more female elected MPs at both national and state/region levels. Women MPs comprised about 13.5% of elected MPs in national parliament and 13% for state/region parliaments. Myanmar also has a category of “ethnic affairs ministers” who are elected to represent ethnic groups in the states and regions which reach 0.1% of the total population. There were 29 ethnic affairs ministers elected in the 2015 elections, and 11% of candidates for those posts were women.

Beginning in 2016, sixty-seven women were serving in the national parliament, more than twice as many as served in the previous parliamentary term. More than 13% of elected representatives at the national level are women, with 23 women elected to the upper house and 44 to the lower house. Only two women military officers, who also served in the lower house from 2014 through 2015, have been delegated by the military to serve in the national parliament.

Of the 55 women elected to Myanmar's parliaments in 2010 and 2012, 40 ran for re-election in 2015. Of these, only twelve were re-elected, a very high rate of turnover.

Table 9: 2016 Members of Parliament, by Gender

	Elected MPs		Military-appointed MPs		Women as % of Elected MPs	Women as % of All MPs
	Men	Women	Men	Women		
National Parliament Total	424	67	164	2	13.7%	10.5%
Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House)	145	23	56	0	13.7%	10.3%
Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House)	279	44	108	2	13.6%	10.6%
State and Region Parliaments	551	79	219	2	12.5%	9.5%
Ethnic Affairs Ministers	24	5	-	-	17.2%	-

Source: Union Election Commission Myanmar

In the states and regions, 79 (12.5%) of the incoming elected parliamentarians, and five (17.2%) of the 29 elected ethnic affairs ministers are women.⁸³ There is generally greater female representation in the states and regions than previously. Yangon Region Hluttaw became the regional parliament with the highest number of elected women MPs, increasing the number from 6 to 17. Sagaing Region Hluttaw and Mon State Hluttaw saw the most dramatic gains, with 13 women MPs and 5 women MPs respectively from zero. Since there are only 20 elected MPs in Mon State, the 5 women MPs constitute a quarter of female parliamentary representation of any state and region. In an even more significant development on February 8, 2016, one of the five women MPs on Mon State was elected to be the speaker of a parliamentary body for the first time: Daw Tin Ei is now serving as the speaker of the Mon State parliament.⁸⁴ Daw Nan Thu Zar is serving as a Deputy Speaker of Kayin State Hluttaw. There is, however, no elected and appointed women MPs in parliaments in Kayah, Chin, or Rakhine. (See Annex 3 for further details.)

The new generation of women MPs is slightly younger than their male counterparts. The median age of male MPs in national parliament is around 55 years, whereas for women it is around 50. Median age for MPs in the state and region is slightly younger than their national counterparts, with men around 49 and women around 44.

The new women MPs are more educated than their male counterparts. In the national parliament, women achieved generally a higher degree of educational attainment than their male colleagues, with 93.9% of them holding at least the equivalent of a bachelor's degree (compared to 77.7% of male MPs), and 22.7% who obtained post-graduate degrees (compared to 8.5% of male MPs).

In the states and regions, 92.8% of the 2016 female representatives had obtained at least a bachelor's degree (compared to 66.9% of male MPs), and 10.7% have obtained post-graduate degrees (compared to 3.2% of male MPs).

Table 10: 2016 National and State/Region Parliamentary Educational Attainment, by Gender

	Pyidaungsu Hluttaw MPs		State/Region Hluttaw MPs	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Basic Education (<10 th Standard)	2.1%	0%	3.8%	3.6%
Basic Education (Matriculation)	17.4%	6.0%	28.6%	3.6%
BA/BSc and equivalent	69.2%	71.2%	63.7%	82.1%
MA/MEdSc	6.4%	22.7%	3%	7.1%
PhD/Dr.MedSc	2.1%	0%	0.2%	3.6%
Blank/Unknown	2.8%	0%	0.9%	0%

Source: Union Election Commission Myanmar

Women elected to parliament in 2015 came from occupational backgrounds quite different from their female predecessors but relatively comparable to their male colleagues. Nearly a quarter (24.2%) of women in the national parliament came from backgrounds in business, 15.2% worked in medicine, and 18.2% came from backgrounds in civil service or politics. Proportionally fewer women came from educational and legal backgrounds. For detailed comparison of occupational background between male and female MPs see Annex 4.

⁸³ Women Ethnic Affairs Ministers include Daw Hmway Hmway Khin, Daw Naw Pwal Say, Daw San Wint Khaing, Daw Pan Thinzar Myo, and Gar Moe Myat Myat Thu.

⁸⁴ <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/mon-state-elects-parliaments-first-female-speaker.html>.

Similarly, in the states and regions, occupational experience in business dominated for elected women (28.6%.) About a fifth of women representatives in states and regions came through the education sector. More surprisingly, in a marked change from the parliamentary class of 2011-2016, 14.3% of female representatives came from agricultural backgrounds perhaps suggesting that the concept of electoral politics is making greater inroads into rural communities.⁸⁵ For more detailed information on occupational background of male and female state/region MPs see Annex 4.

Table 11: Occupational Background of Female Parliamentarians, 2013 and 2016, Selected Categories

National			State/region		
	2013	2016		2013	2016
Law	20.0%	9.1%	Law	5.0%	11.9%
Education	20.0%	10.6%	Education	40.0%	20.2%
Civil service/politics	20.0%	18.2%	Civil service/politics	20.0%	9.5%
Business	16.7%	24.2%	Business	0%	28.6%
Social work	10.0%	6.1%	Social work	10.0%	0%

Source: Union Election Commission Myanmar: The Parliaments of Myanmar, MCM Books (Yangon, June 2013); Survey Responses

Comparing the occupational backgrounds of female MPs with male MPs, particularly at the national level, what stands out is the higher proportion number of female MPs coming from political party work and from the NGO world. Their engagement in political parties, development work and social activism underline their political awareness and the more open space in the 2015 elections provided the channel for them to enter the political arena. (See Annex 4 for more details on occupational backgrounds of MPs.)

Women entering parliament in 2016 represent substantially fewer political parties than did their predecessors.

At the national level and regional level, women belonged to only six political parties. Nationally, women in parliament represent only nine political parties, the vast majority of whom (134) are members of the National League for Democracy. While it is encouraging to see the NLD with such a high number of women within its ranks, the only downside would appear to be that the number of women in office in Myanmar is now highly reliant on the electoral prospects of the NLD. And indeed, a major NLD setback at the polls would likely sharply curtail the number of women MPs at both the national and state/region levels.

Table 12: Political Parties with Women Parliamentarians, 2016

National	# of women	State/Region	# of women
Arakan National Party	2	Tai-Leng Nationalities Development Party	1
National League for Democracy	60	Kachin State Democracy Party	1
Shan Nationalities League for Democracy	2	Lisu National Development Party	1
Ta'arng (Palaung) National Party	1	National League for Democracy	74
Union Solidarity and Development Party	1	Shan Nationalities League for Democracy	5
Zomi Congress for Democracy	1	Union Solidarity and Development Party	2

Source: Union Election Commission Myanmar

⁸⁵ Agricultural backgrounds cover a wide range of occupations as defined by the MPs themselves, including commodity traders, agriculture-related machinery sellers, livestock breeders, and farmers.

6.2 Reflections from Survey Findings and Insights from Women Parliamentarians, 2011-2016

This report seeks to provide a more in depth view of the experiences of the first generation of women MPs who were in office between 2011 and 2016 to understand their motivations and challenges in political life. The research team hopes that insights gained from the research would be useful for the next generation of women MPs as well as for the government, political parties, civil society organizations and the broader development community in providing more targeted support to strengthen women's political participation.

Along with the key findings presented previously, a summary of some broader reflections of the survey data and what implications they may have for future programs aimed at supporting more women in political life in Myanmar and in parliament is also provided. The research team has also included here some of the women MPs' insights and advice to the next generation of women MPs based on their own hard won experiences. The most consistent theme running through their suggestions relate to the importance of self-confidence. Being prepared, persistent, and open to learning and working with others, as well as building trust, were all seen as key elements of success by these trailblazing women MPs. Again and again, however, it was that call for faith in oneself that underscored the advice of one generation of women MPs to the next.

"Try hard for people to see you as a person they can trust, not only as a woman. You need to be strong. Don't be discouraged when you face difficulties. You will be hearing about many problems from your constituents and solving the problems for them. So, please be patient. You will also need to learn from them and try to explain to them so that they can have better understanding of whatever is the situation. On the technical side, study laws. You need to study a lot." ⁸⁶

Women MPs felt strongly that the biggest challenge for them were not their male counterparts or male voters, but other women voters who did not support women in political life. This is perhaps one of the more surprising findings from the research. The view came out very clearly from the women MPs' responses to the survey questionnaire, with 82% of the women MPs indicating that the "lack of support from women voters" were their number one obstacle in preventing women from entering politics, much higher than the prevailing cultural norms (58%) or male voters (51%). This issue was not much discussed by the women MPs during in depth interviews or in other forums, but they do raise specifically their sense of discomfort with the disapproval they received when they traveled to campaign much of which came from other women who viewed their political activities as inappropriate. The Foundation's own research as well as other research have highlighted the specific gender challenge in Myanmar in that the same high proportion of men as well as women disapprove of women's leadership in society. As such, the fact that the women MPs themselves felt more acutely the lack of support from other women than from men again underscores the sense of isolation some women who pursue political positions can feel, contributing to their sense of guilt of not following the dominant social norms and their lack of confidence. This is an important factor in considering what should be the right strategy for women's empowerment programs when such a significant knowledge and awareness gap exists among women, which may hinder their support for legislations, policies, and practices for gender equality.

Self-confidence is arguably the most important factor in the performance of women MPs. The issue of self-confidence, or lack thereof, was a consistent theme in the analysis of the survey data. Women MPs, for example, were just as or more educated and often just as active in Parliament as their male counterparts based on empirical data, but they often perceived themselves as lacking in knowledge and skills, less confident and less active than their male peers. This sense of being less than others can make the women MPs less comfortable and less active in pushing forward their own views and assessments, believing that others know more than they do even when the data shows otherwise. When asked about the obstacles preventing women from entering politics, 80% of the women MPs resoundingly pointed to "lack of confidence" as the second most important obstacles.

⁸⁶ Interview, MP4.

The advice that women MPs have for the next generation of women MPs shows that they are clearly aware of their sense of confidence embedded in cultural and social norms have impacted their development and work. As such, this is a factor that should be well considered in any programs aimed at supporting women in politics.

“No one is a master since s/he was born. We become knowledgeable and efficient because of nurturing from the environment and communicating with people. Don’t look down on yourself. Your capability in your family is the same as your capability in the outside world. Important thing is to have high confidence. Your will is the key. If you intend to work for the betterment of your family, environment and country, you will be successful. If you can’t do it alone, you can work together with others. That will make you successful.”⁸⁷

“Willingness to work and have strong will. Build up your capacity so that you will become qualified. Have self-confidence. Withstand the pressure and sacrifice when needed. Instead of thinking what you can get, think of what you can give. You must always think of how to be successful. Always encourage yourself.”⁸⁸

“Don’t be afraid. No need to be that afraid of politics. Please study about the nature of politics.”⁸⁹

Women MPs need more training and skills in technical areas (such as legislative drafting and budgeting) and public speaking/communication to be more effective in Parliament. Parliaments provided women MPs with more technical skill-based capacity development on issues such as research, legislative drafting, planning, and finance. Political parties have played a critical role in supporting MPs with constituent engagement. CSOs and INGOs have focused more on gender-inclusive policy development programs for women MPs. With regard to capacity building, the women MPs felt strongly that they needed more technical training in areas such as legislative drafting and budget analysis and oversight to help them engage substantively with these critical topics related to their roles as MPs. Secondly, women MPs also felt strongly about improving their communication skills and public speaking ability to increase both their self-confidence and make them more effective when campaigning as candidates and to communicate with the public once they became MPs.

“Read more to become knowledgeable and always work with full confidence. Approach professionals to get their help and try to become proficient with the work that you need to do in the parliament.”⁹⁰

“Make sure that you understand the law and politics (read more journals). You should know that in detail. Look at how big parties work.”⁹¹

“You need to know how to search for information. Another important thing is good communication skill and a habit of working together with others. You need to put yourself into other people’s shoes and understand their perspectives. Always improve yourself. Read books, especially study about laws. Keep updated with information.”⁹²

“You should expect difficulties. You need to learn about budget, public speaking skills and law in advance. Don’t be arrogant. Be persistent.”⁹³

⁸⁷ MP10’s response to questionnaire #41.

⁸⁸ MP39’s response to questionnaire #41.

⁸⁹ Interview, MP8.

⁹⁰ MP10’s response to questionnaire #41.

⁹¹ MP14’s response to questionnaire #41.

⁹² Interview, MP29.

⁹³ MP31’s response to questionnaire #41.

Women MPs faced a wide range of incidents of discrimination, but they are often reluctant to frame such behavior or action as gender-based. Only one-third (33%) of women MPs surveyed indicated that they had experienced gender-based discrimination in their political careers, raising specific incidents of disrespect or verbal abuse which they felt their male peers would not have been subjected to, especially from government employees, then by party leaders and male colleagues in parliament. In in depth interviews however, many women MPs who had not indicated experiencing discrimination in the survey described being excluded from male-dominated discussions on policy, whether during party meetings or informal gatherings of male MPs at local restaurants or drinking establishments; being excluded from learning opportunities such as study tours; and being addressed with patronizing language on the floor of parliament or in party meetings. Given the small number of women MPs, their own political activism and the sense of disapproval they feel from many in the broader society particularly other women, women MPs themselves tend not to define some of the challenges they faced as gender-based. As such, there is little common perspective among the women MPs on the gender dimension of their work and what may be effective solutions that they can pursue whether individually or as a group.

Political parties are particularly important in providing critical support to MPs in Myanmar, including women MPs, but their general lack of gender-related policies are hindering potential legislative progress on gender equality. The research shows the critical role that political parties play in supporting political candidates in their campaigning and then in their roles as MPs. The support that the women MPs get is generally limited, but the support they do get from their political parties is the most consistent in their political life in terms of knowledge, information, and even financial. At the same time, however, given that political parties were suppressed for many years under military rule and have only been able to operate openly in recent years, such support to political candidates and to MPs is critical but remains quite minimal. In this context, gender focus is often not considered by political parties but MPs are bound to adhere to the policies of their political parties. There is clear tension between the women MPs' sense of independence, including their commitment to gender issues, and their adherence to party policies. Ninety-one percent of the women MPs surveyed felt very strong commitment to represent the interests of women, with 71% of them feeling that they are independent to follow through their own interest without party support. Yet 36% of women MPs surveyed also feel very strongly that they cannot do anything about a particular issue if there is no supporting party policy. As such, there is a strong need to work with political parties to help define the appropriate gender platform they should have and accompanying policies to assist all MPs, and women MPs in particular, to support gender equality and empowerment in Myanmar.

Women MPs don't regularly collaborate among themselves. Collaboration between women in parliament occurred most frequently among women who shared a party. Respondents most frequently collaborated with women from within their own parties to advocate for the passage of legislation, with 51% indicating they worked with other women in their parties a 'great deal' or a 'fair amount.' Forty-seven percent worked with other women in their parties on committee research, and 42% collaborated on research to support the development of legislation. Committee assignments seemed to provide the primary opportunity for women to work with women from other parties but very little collaboration across party lines otherwise. In this context, increasing opportunities for women to connect to and engage meaningfully with other women, especially across party lines, can facilitate the development of professional support networks and the collective power to advance shared interests.

"Women should cooperate with each other. Women should be involved in decision-making process. They need to believe that they can do it."⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Interview, MP14.

Annex 1: Committee Membership of National Women Parliamentarians (2011 – 2016)

Amyotha Hluttaw

Sr.	Name	Party	Committee	Position
1	Daw Khin Wine Kyi	NDF	Education, Health, Women and Children Affairs Committee	Chairwoman
2	Daw Nan Ni Ni Aye	USDP	Hluttaw Rights Committee	Secretary
3	Daw Yi Yi Myint	USDP	1.Public Accounts Committee 2.National Planning and Development Project Affairs Committee	Secretary Secretary
4	Daw Naw May Re Yan	USDP	Government's Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee	Member

Source: Amyotha Hluttaw Office (January 2015)

Pyithu Hluttaw

Sr.	Name	Party	Committee	Position
1	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	NLD	Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee	Chairman
2	Daw Tin Tin Yi	NLD	Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee	Member
3	Daw Sandar Min	NLD	1. Investment and Industrial Development Committee 2. Commerce and Trade Development Committee	Member Member
4	Daw Khin Saw Wai	RNDP	1.Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee 2.Government's Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee	Member Member
5	Daw Dwe Bu	UDPKS	1.Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee 2.National Races Affairs and Peace Making Committee	Member Secretary
6	Daw Mi Yin Chan	USDP	1.Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee 2.Public Accounts Committee	Member Member
7	Daw Lei Lei Win Swe	USDP	1.Rule of Law and Tranquility Committee 2.Population and Social Development Committee	Member
8	Daw Zar Ta Lam	CNP	Social Development Committee	Member
9	Daw Khin Than Myint	USDP	Social Development Committee	Member
10	Daw Nan Say Hwa	PSDP	Social Development Committee	Member
11	Dr. May Win Myint	NLD	Social Development Committee	Member
12	Dr. Daw Aye Myint	USDP	Social Development Committee	Member
13	Daw Khin Htay Kywe	NLD	Bill Committee	Member

14	Daw Nan War Nu	SNDP	1.Bill Committee 2.Legal Affairs and Special Issues Assessment Commission	Member Member
15	Daw Mi Myint Than	All Mon Regions Democracy Party	1.Hluttaw Rights Committee 2.National Races Affairs, Rural Socio Development and Internal Peace Implementation Committee	Member Member
16	Daw Nan Non	USDP	Hluttaw Rights Committee	Member
17	Daw Tin Nwal Oo	NDF	Public Accounts Committee	Member
18	Daw Su Su Lwin	NLD	International Relations Committee	Member
19	Daw Khin Thandar	NLD	Government's Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee	Member
20	Daw Khin Mhway Lwin	NLD	National Planning, Union Budget and Tax Oversight and Coordination Committee	Member
21	Daw Phyu Phyu Thin	NLD	1. National Planning, Union Budget and Tax Oversight and Coordination Committee 2. Reform and Development Oversight Committee	Member Member
22	Daw Khin San Hlaing	NLD	Banks and Monetary Development Committee	Member
23	Daw Myint Myint San	NLD	Farmers, Workers and Youth Affairs Committee	Member
24	Dr. Daw Than Ngwe	NLD	Committee for the Enhancement of Health	Member

Source: Pyithu Hluttaw Office (January 2017)

Annex 2: Committee Membership of National Women Parliamentarians (2016 – 2021)

Amyotha Hluttaw

Sr.	Name	Party	Committee	Position
1	Daw Shila Nan Taung@ M Nan Taung	NLD	Committee for Ethnic Affairs	Chairman
2	Daw Naw Mya Say	NLD	Committee for the Enhancement of Education	Chairman
3	Daw Naw Hla Hla Soe	NLD	1.Committee for Women's and Children's Rights 2.Public Accounts Committee	Secretary Member
4	Daw Htu May	Arakan National Party	1.International Relations, Parliamentary Friendships and Cooperation Committee 2.Public Accounts Committee	Secretary Member
5	Daw Nan Ni Ni Aye	USDP	1.Bills Committee 2.Committee for People's Denunciations	Member Member
6	Daw Kyain Ngeik Man	Zomi Congress for Democracy	Bills Committee	Member
7	Daw Nwe Nwe Aung	NLD	Bills Committee	Member
8	Daw Hla Htay @ Daw Ohn Kyi	NLD	Bills Committee	Member
9	Daw Shwe Shwe Sein Latt	NLD	1.Public Accounts Committee 2. Non-governmental Organizations and International Non-governmental Organizations Committee	Member Member
10	Daw Naw Christ Htun @ Dr. Arr Kar Moe	NLD	Hluttaw Privileges Committee	Member
11	Daw Myat Thida Htun	NLD	1.Hluttaw Privileges Committee 2. Non-governmental Organizations and International Non-governmental Organizations Committee	Member Member
12	Daw Khin Swe Lwin	NLD	1. Government's Guarantees, Pledges and Undertaking Vetting Committee 2. Committee for Women's and Children's Rights	Member
13	Daw Nan Moe Moe Htway	NLD	1.International Relations, Parliamentary Friendships and Cooperation Committee 2. Committee for Internal and Migrant Myanmar Workers	Member Member
14	Daw Naw Sar Mu Htoo	NLD	1.Non-governmental Organizations and International Non-governmental Organizations Committee 2.Farmers' Affairs Committee	Member Member
15	Daw Lwie Zar	NLD	Sports, Health and Culture Committee	Member

16	Daw Thiri Yadanar	NLD	1.Committee for Ethnic Affairs 2.Committee for Mineral Resources and Environmental Protection	Member Member
17	Daw Ma Ma Lay	NLD	1.Committee for Ethnic Affairs 2.Committee on the Development of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries	Member Member
18	Daw May Than Nwet	NLD	1.Committee for the Enhancement of Education 2.Committee for Human Rights, Democracy and Basic Rights of the Citizens	Member Member
19	Dr. Tin Tin Win	NLD	Committee for Women's and Children's Rights	Member
20	Daw Than Than Aye	NLD	Committee for the Enhancement of Education	Member
21	Dr. Khin Ma Gyi	NLD	Committee for Internal and Migrant Myanmar Workers	Member
22	Daw Ei Ei Pyone	NLD	1. Committee for Internal and Migrant Myanmar Workers 2. Committee for Women's and Children's Rights	Member
23	Daw Shar Mu	NLD	Committee on Mineral Resources and Environmental Protection	Member

Source: Amyotha Hluttaw Office (January, 2017)

Pyithu Hluttaw

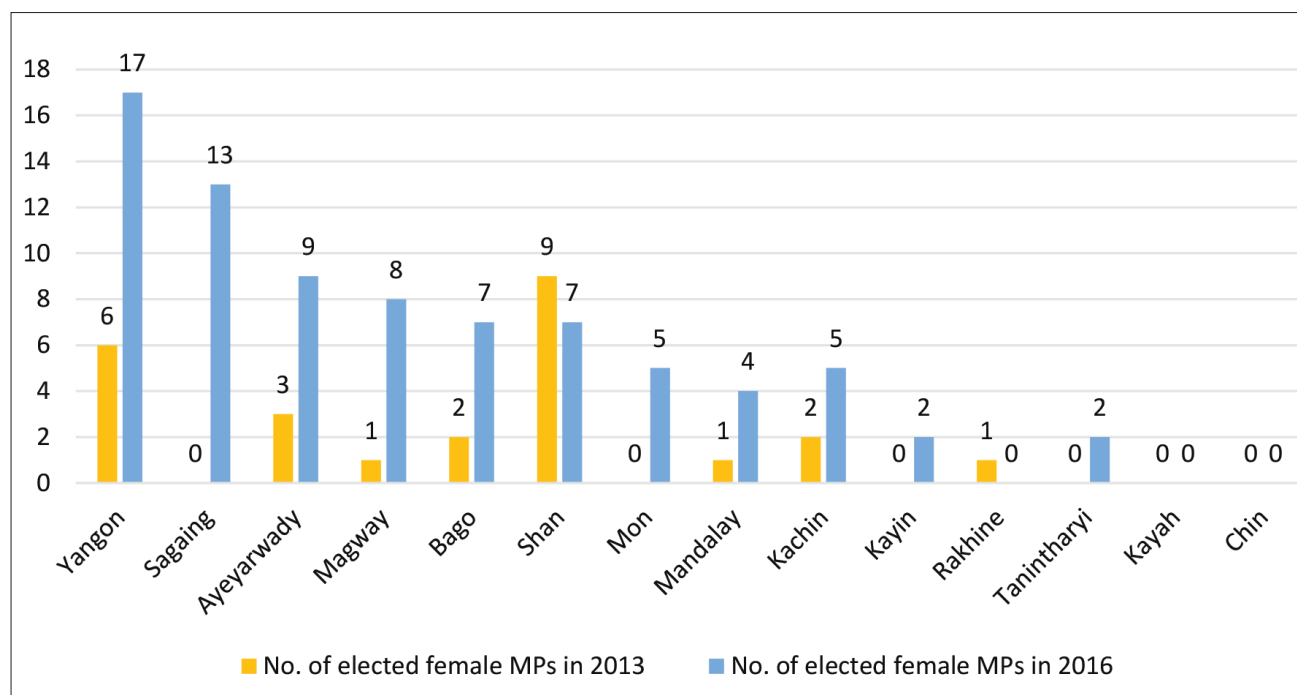
Sr.	Name	Party	Committee	Position
1	Dr. May Win Myint	NLD	Government's Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee	Chairman
2	Daw Khin San Hlaing	NLD	Banks and Monetary Affairs Development Committee	Chairman
3	Dr. Daw Thet Thet Khaing	NLD	Banks and Monetary Affairs Development Committee	Member
4	Daw Cho Cho	NLD	Banks and Monetary Affairs Development Committee	Member
5	Daw Khin Moh Moh Aung	NLD	Banks and Monetary Affairs Development Committee	Member
6	Daw Ni Shwe Lian	NLD	Government's Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee	Member
7	Daw Nan Than Than Lwin	NLD	Government's Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee	Member
8	Daw Tin Tin Yi	NLD	Government's Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee	Member
9	Daw Khin Saw Wai	Arakan National Party (RNDP)?	Government's Guarantees, Pledges and Undertakings Vetting Committee	Member

10	Daw Cho Cho Win	NLD	Public Accounts Committee	Member
11	Daw Ni Ni Don	NLD	Public Accounts Committee	Member
12	Daw Mar Mar Khaing	NLD	Bills Committee	Member
13	Daw Myint Myint Soe @ Daw May Soe	NLD	Judiciary and Legal Affairs Committee	Member
14	Daw Khin Sandy	NLD	Judiciary and Legal Affairs Committee	Member
15	Daw Aye Mya Mya Myo	NLD	Judiciary and Legal Affairs Committee	Member
16	Daw Soe Nwe Aye	NLD	Judiciary and Legal Affairs Committee	Member
17	Daw Nan Htwe Thu	NLD	Hluttaw Rights Committee	Member
18	Daw Thandar	NLD	Fundamental Rights of Citizens Committee	Member
19	Daw Nan Kham Aye	SNLD	National Races Affairs and Internal Peace Implementation Committee	Member
20	Daw Pyone Kay Thi Naing	NLD	International Relations Committee	Member
21	Daw Khin Hnin Thit	NLD	International Relations Committee	Member
22	Daw Mi Kon Chan	NLD	International Relations Committee	Member
23	Daw Nan Moe	Ta-Arng Palaung National Party	International Relations Committee	Member
24	Dr. Shwe Pon	NLD	International Relations Committee	Member
25	Daw Yin Min Hlaing	NLD	Transportation, Communication and Construction Committee	Member
26	Daw Mya Khwar Nyo Oo	NLD	Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation Committee	Member
27	Daw San San Ei	NLD	Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation Committee	Member
28	Daw Nan Khin Saw	SNLD	Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation Committee	Member
29	Daw Ni Ni May Myint	NLD	Farmers and Workers Affairs Committee	Member
30	Daw Zin Mar Aung	NLD	Public Affairs Management Committee	Member
31	Dr. Daw Pyone	NLD	Public Affairs Management Committee	Member
32	Daw Khin Than Nu	NLD	Public Affairs Management Committee	Member
33	Dr. Khin Soe Soe Kyi	NLD	Health and Sport Development Committee	Member
34	Dr. Daw Than Ngwe	NLD	Health and Development Committee	Member
35	Dr. Daw Khin Nyo	NLD	Health and Sport Development Committee	Member

36	Daw Aye Aye Mu@ Daw Shar Mee	NLD	Health and Sport Development Committee	Member
37	Daw Phyu Phyu Thin	NLD	Health and Sport Development Committee	Member
38	Dr. Daw Kyi Moh Moh Lwin	NLD	Economic and Finance Development Committee	Member
39	Daw Wint War Tun	NLD	Economic and Finance Development Committee	Member

Source: Pyithu Hluttaw Office Website (December 2016)

Annex 3: Percentage of Elected Female Representatives in State/Region Parliaments, 2013 and 2016



Annex 4: 2016 National and State/Region Parliamentary Occupational Background, by Gender

	Pyidaungsu Hluttaw MPs		State and Region Hluttaw MPs	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Business/merchant/manufacturing/shop keeping	29.4%	24.2%	33.9%	28.6%
Agriculture/fisheries/livestock/market gardening	15.3%	4.5%	20.5%	14.3%
Doctor/dentist/health service/veterinary	9.2%	15.2%	6.6%	2.4%
Political party official/politician/parliamentarian	8.7%	16.7%	7.8%	8.3%
Education/teacher (primary, secondary, tutoring private)	9.4%	7.6%	10.1%	19%
Lawyer/legal services	8.7%	9.1%	4.9%	11.9%
Civil service/government administration	3.5%	1.5%	5%	1.2%
Social worker/NGO worker/community association	1.6%	6.1%	0%	1.2%
Defense services	2.6%	0%	1.6%	0%
None/blank/unknown	2.1%	1.5%	1.4%	3.6%
Education/professor (university level)	1.6%	3%	0.5%	1.2%
Writer/artist/photographer	1.6%	1.5%	0.9%	0%
Engineer/electrician	1.4%	0%	1.4%	1.2%
Retired	1.2%	1.5%	1.4%	0%
Journalism/media/publishing	0.9%	0%	0.3%	1.2%
Computer/IT	0.9%	0%	0.5%	0%
Construction/mechanic	0.7%	0%	2.1%	0%
Dependent	0%	4.5%	0.2%	3.6%
Homemaker	0%	3%	0%	0%
Finance/Accounting	0.5%	0%	0.3%	1.2%
Science/research	0.2%	0%	0%	0%
Mining	0%	0%	0.3%	0%
Nursing	0%	0%	0%	1.2%
Student	0%	0%	0.2%	0%

Source: Union Election Commission Myanmar

Annex 5: Survey of Women Parliamentarians in Myanmar



The Asia Foundation

Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities



SURVEY OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIAN EXPERIENCES IN MYANMAR

Joint collaboration between Phan Tee Eain (Creative Home) and The Asia Foundation (TAF)

In this survey, we are interested in personal opinions and views about the experiences of the women who have served as members of parliament. There is no right or wrong response and it is all about what the individual thinks about the issue, so we encourage you to answer fully and honestly. All answers will be kept confidential and no names or identifying information will be given to anyone or published without your express prior permission; however, data obtained through report may be published in aggregate.

We will be conducting follow-up interviews with some members of parliament after the questionnaires are completed.

May we contact you for a follow-up interview? Yes _____ No _____

A. BACKGROUND

Personal information				
Name:				
Age/Birth date:				
Marital Status: (Please select one)	Married	Single	Divorced	Widowed
Education	Basic Education	Diploma	Degree	Others
Where did you grow up? (Village/Township, State/Region):				
Where do you live now? (Village/Township, State/Region):				

In which house of parliament are you currently serving?

Pyithu Hluttaw	
Amyotha Hluttaw	
State-Regional Hluttaw	

What was your profession or occupation before you became an MP?

Occupation	Please tick	Years (from – to)
Teacher		
Professor		
Social worker/ NGO worker		
Political party official		
Doctor/ Dentist		
Engineer		
Homemaker		
Trade/Labor organizing		
Armed services / Police		
Finance or accounting		
Business/ entrepreneur		
Journalist/ Media		
Scientist/ Researcher		
Civil service / government administration		

Nursing		
Writer / Artist		
Legal profession		
Retired		
Other (Please describe):		

B. ENTRY INTO POLITICS

Q1. What was your main motivation to become involved in politics?

Q2. In what way did you first get involved in politics?

No.		Please tick
1	Social work	
2	Political party activity	
3	Non-governmental organization or CSO	
4	Family connections	
5	Trade/Labor organizing	
6	Community-based organization	
7	Township development committee	
8	Village development committee	
9	Religious organization	
10	Other (Please describe):	

Q3. Were you a member of a political party when you ran for office (in 2010 or 2012)?

Yes	No
-----	----

Q3.1. If yes, what was your role in your political party before you became MP?

No.	Position	Please tick
1	Central Executive Committee (CEC)	
2	Central Executive Committee (Reserved)	
3	Central Committee (CC)	
4	Central Committee (Reserved)	
5	Central Working Committee (CWC)	

6	State-Regional Party Leadership	
7	District Party Leadership	
8	Township Party Leadership	
9	Township Party Member	
10	Volunteer	
11	Independent	
12	Not a party member or organization member	
13	Other (please describe):	

Q4. How supportive were the following people of your involvement in politics?

	Very upportive	A little supportive	Neither supportive nor unsupportive	Not very supportive	Very unsupportive	Don't know
Spouse / Domestic Partner						
Parents						
Relatives						
Co-workers / professional colleagues						
Patron/ Mentor						
Friends						
Neighbors/ local community						
Social networks or associations						
Professional networks or associations						
Others (please describe):						

Q5. Did you run for parliamentary office in the 1990 general elections?

Yes	No
-----	----

Q6. Were you selected as an MP in 1990 general elections?

Yes	No
-----	----

Q7. Did you participate in the national assembly that drafted 2008 constitution?

Yes	No
-----	----

C. ELECTION/APPOINTMENT AS MP (IN 2010 OR 2012)

Q8. What motivated you to become a candidate for MP?

Q9. As an MP, what is the policy issue that personally matters to you the most?

Q10. Before and during the election, what kind of election-related support did you receive from other people or organizations (including political parties), and who provided (including political parties)?

Support	Yes	No	Provided by Whom? (for example, Individual/Party/ Organization)
Education on role of MPs, legislative work and oversight functions			
Campaign financing			
Electoral campaigning & voter outreach			
Election day monitoring/observation support			
Support especially intended for female candidates			
No support			
Other (please describe):			

Q10.1. If you received no support from other people or organizations (including political parties/ individual, organization), please tell us about how you supported your own campaign.

Q11. What kind of support was most valuable to you before and during the election?

Q12. Before and during the election, what kind of challenges did you face?

Q13. How much has your life changed since becoming an MP?

Completely	Very much	Only a little bit	Not at all

Q14. What was the biggest change in your life since becoming an MP?

D. CONSTITUENT ENGAGEMENT

Q15. Do you feel you receive enough information to understand the needs and concerns of your constituents?

Yes, I get lots of information	I get some information, but I wish I could get more	I feel I received very little information	I feel I don't receive any information	Not sure/ Don't know

Q16. How often do you receive information about the needs and concerns of your constituents from the following sources?

	Very often	Often	Not often	Never
Political Party				
Media				
CSOs				
Colleagues in parliament				
Family and friends				

Directly from constituents				
Local authorities (township/village)				
Ministries and other government agencies				
International organizations				
Others (please describe):				

Q17. What are the top 3 concerns of your constituents? Please select three only and rank them?

Biggest concern = 1

Second biggest concern = 2

Third biggest concern = 3

Concerns	Please select only three (3) concerns
Inadequate electricity	
Poverty	
Unemployment	
Corruption/ bad government	
Prevalence of narcotics trafficking/ use	
High crime levels	
Armed conflict/ethnic conflict/religious conflict	
Infrastructure Development	
Environmental degradation	
Poor education/schools	
Land grabbing	
Land disputes (other than land grabbing)	
Inadequate/ unclean drinking water	
Insufficient water for irrigation	
Foreign investment	
Poor health facilities / Lack of good public hospitals	
Other (describe)	
Other (describe)	
Other (describe)	

Q18. How do you know that these are the top 3 concerns of your constituents?

Q19. Do you think that constituent engagement needs to be improved?

Yes	No
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Q20. If yes, what actions do you think are needed in order to improve constituent engagement?

E. EXPERIENCE IN PARLIAMENT

Q21. After the election, what kind of support have you received as an MP and who provided it?

Support	Yes	No	Provided by Whom? (for example, Individual/party/organization/parliament)
Capacity building on roles and responsibilities of MPs			
Capacity building on researching and drafting legislation			
Capacity building on planning and financial oversight			
Capacity building on public speaking			
Support for constituency engagement			
Capacity building on policy development that is inclusive and gender sensitive			
Support especially for female MPs			
Received no support			
Other (please describe):			

Q22. What kind of support has been most valuable to you since the election?

Q23. How active are you in the following policy areas?

Policy Areas	I'm on a committee/ commission for this issue	Very active	Fairly active	Not very active	Not at all active
Agriculture					
Constitutional affairs					
Economic and trade development					
Education					
Environment / conservation					
Finance					
Foreign affairs					
Gender equality					
Healthcare					
Human rights					
Infrastructure					
Labor					
Rural development					
Judicial and legal affairs					
Research and technology					
National security					
Social and community affairs					
Women's issues					
Other (please describe):					

Q24. Have you ever introduced your own bill?

Yes	No
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Q23.1. If not, why not?

Q25. How often have you raised questions about proposed legislation or policy at public sessions of parliament?

0	1-5	6-15	16-30	31 and above	Don't Know
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Q26. How often have you raised question about proposed legislation or policy through sealed envelope to relevant ministries?

0	1-5	6-15	16-30	31 and above	Don't Know
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Q27. How much influence, in your opinion, does the following have in affecting the adoption of legislation?

Support	Great deal	Fair amount	Not very much	None	Don't know
Ruling party support					
Opposition party/group support					
Own party support					
Alliance party support					
Support of men MPs					
Support of women MPs					
Support of constituency					
Support of CSOs					
Support of business community					
Support of international community					
Other (please describe):					

Q28. Have you faced any difficulties as an MP?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Disparaging or harassing remarks			
Lack of resources or information to support my work			
Balancing family life and political commitments			
Lack of access to Informal networks/relationships in parliament			
Unfair or uninformed criticism by media			
Other (please describe):			

Q29. In your time as an MP, what accomplishment are you most satisfied with? (i.e., for yourself, your constituency, your party or your country)

F. WOMEN IN POLITICAL OFFICE

Q30. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Women MPs have a responsibility to represent the interests of women in society at large					
Women and men should have an equal role in running the government					
MPs are accountable first and foremost to their political party					
MPs are accountable first and foremost to their constituency					
MPs can only address women's issues if the party has developed specific policies on women					
MPs are free to address any issues without party support					
The more women there are in parliament, the more influence they will have on political priorities and policies					

Q31. How much do you feel these obstacles prevent women from entering politics?

	Very much	Fair amount	Not very much	Not at all	Don't know
Prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the roles of women in society					
Religion					
Security concerns					
Lack of finances					
Domestic responsibilities					
Lack of support from political parties					
Politics seen as dangerous, dirty or corrupt					
Lack of education					
Lack of confidence					
Lack of support from family (i.e., parents, spouse)					
Lack of support from other relatives					
Lack of support from constituency					
Lack of support from female voters					

Lack of support from male voter					
Lack of experience with representative functions: public speaking, constituency relations					
Others (please describe):					

Q32. Do you think you have personally experienced discrimination in your political career because you are a woman?

Yes	No	Not Sure
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Q32.1. If yes, do you think you have experienced discrimination when interacting with the following individuals or organizations because you are a woman?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Male colleagues in parliament			
Female colleagues in parliament			
Other government staff			
Political party leadership			
Political party members			
Constituents			
Media			
Other (please describe):			

Q32.2. If yes, do you think you have experienced discrimination in the following situations because you are a woman?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Fundraising for election campaign			
Participating in internal party discussions regarding policies and priorities			
Assignment to committees related to the MPs interest and expertise			
Participating in committee activities			
Developing and introducing legislation			
Raising support from other MPs to pass legislation			
Providing critical feedback and input into legislation proposed by others			
Other (please describe):			

Q33. How often do women in parliament collaborate on the following activities?

	Great deal	Fair amount	Not very much	None	Don't know
With women from their own parties:					
To advocate for passage of legislation					
To provide research support for legislation					
To collaborate on committee research and reports					
To collaborate to raise awareness in the media on any issue					
Other (please describe):					
With women from other parties:					
To advocate for passage of legislation					
To provide research support for legislation					
To collaborate on committee research and reports					
To collaborate to raise awareness in the media on any issue					
Other (please describe):					

Q34. What obstacles exist that may discourage or prevent collaboration between women parliamentarians?

Q35. In your opinion, what would be the most effective way to increase the number of women in politics?

Q36. In your opinion, how effective would each of these activities be for increasing the number of women in politics?

	Strongly Effective	Effective	Neither Effective nor ineffective	Ineffective	Strongly ineffective
Increase awareness of importance of gender equality among voters (i.e., civic education)					
Capacity building for political parties to increase women participation					

Quotas mandating the number of women in political office					
Increase men's engagement and support for gender equality					
Create a political party comprised only of women					
Other (please describe):					

Q37. Does either of the following have the intention or plan to increase the number of women MPs?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Myanmar Parliament			
Political Parties			
Others (Please describe)			

G. REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Q38. Looking back on your experiences as a woman MP, what do you think has been most helpful to you in doing your job?

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Q39. What do you think is most needed to help you do your job better?

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Q40. Would you run as a candidate again in 2015 election? Why or Why not?

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Q41. The 2015 general elections are approaching. What advice would you give to any new women MPs?

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Q42. Any other comments

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WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN MYANMAR

**Experiences
of Women Parliamentarians
2011-2016**



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PHAN TEE EAIN
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