

# Gender WFP Myanmar



**Gender and Hunger:** WFP believes a world with zero hunger can only be achieved if women, men, girls and boys have equal opportunities, equal access to resources, and equal participation in the decision-making that shape their future. Gender issues are important for WFP because how people experience hunger and malnutrition is intrinsically linked to who they are, their sex and their age. WFP's efforts to reach Global Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) are also tied to Global Goal 5 (Gender Equality) adopted by UN Member States at the Sustainable Development Summit in 2015. Gender-sensitive programmes increase WFP's effectiveness in moving towards the goal of eliminating hunger in our lifetimes.

**WFP Gender Policy:** In May 2015, WFP adopted the new [Gender Policy \(2015 -2020\)](#) reiterating that a world with zero hunger can only be achieved when everyone has equal opportunities, equal access to resources and equal voice in decisions that shape their households, communities and societies. The goal of the Gender Policy is to enable WFP to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into all of its work and activities, to ensure that the different needs of women, men, girls and boys are met. The policy with its four pillars builds on WFP's many successes in the field and promotes that i) food assistance is adapted to different needs and capacities of women, men, girls and boys, ii) equal participation in the design, implementation of food security and nutrition programmes, iii) women and girls have increased power in decision making and iv) food assistance does no harm to the safety, dignity and integrity of women, men, girls and boys receiving assistance.

**Gender Situation in Myanmar:** In Myanmar, strongly defined gender roles passed on over generations are deeply embedded within a cultural or religious coat, making gender inequalities difficult to observe, question and put onto the public agenda. The latest edition of the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) places Myanmar among countries with a high level of gender inequality in social institutions. High to very high levels of discrimination prevail in son bias, family code, physical integrity, resources and assets, and civil liberties. Traditionally, daughters have the responsibility to stay at home and take care of the household, parents getting older, and younger siblings. Habitually, daughters are likely to drop out from school at an early age in order to serve the family needs. Boys, particularly from Muslim communities, are often given priority for breastfeeding and also attending school. Fathers are perceived as the head of the household and primary decision maker over resources, while women bear primary responsibility for child raising as well as caring for her and her husband's parents with limited access to food and other resources. The

## But What Is This Gender About?

**Gender** refers to the socially-constructed roles of and relationships between men and women, including conceptions of both femininity and masculinity, which are passed on through generations. Gender is distinct from sex, which is about biological differences only.

Gender does not mean focusing solely on women or girls, but rather on the inequalities between males and females. Analyses of gender differences often show a disadvantaged and weaker position of women and girls in social, political, economic, legal, educational and physical issues. Because gender roles are socially learned, they can be changed to achieve equity and equality for women, men, girls and boys. This is why gender is mainstreamed throughout WFP interventions aiming to rectify these imbalances by often specifically targeting women and girls.

protracted state of conflict and displacement in various parts of Myanmar prompts negative coping mechanisms, growing sexual violence and vulnerability to risky migration practices with women and girls from ethnic minorities at the highest risk. Women's physical integrity is infringed upon through limitations on women's reproductive rights with abortion being only legal to save a woman's life. Data has suggested that there are far more men possessing a formal land title than women. While historically civil liberties have been quite restricted for all citizens in Myanmar, freedom of movement, access to public space, political participation and career promotion to higher positions for women remain limited. With less than 5 percent women elected to office, women have weaker voice and influence than men in politics.

Myanmar is at a critical juncture for harnessing the forces of economic growth in a way that ensures that everyone can benefit. To achieve these goals, it's necessary for the country to place gender equality and women's empowerment at the centre of national development plans. Myanmar has already undertaken some initial steps in the recent years, acceding to the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Beijing Platform for Action and Global Goals. Through the National Strategic and Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013 -2022), the Government has also committed to protecting the women's rights through creation of enabling systems, structures and practices. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement is currently leading reforms to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment. It is cooperating with other government agencies, civil society, academia, and the international community.

## WFP Gender Response



### Mainstreaming Gender Equality:

Based on WFP Gender Policy, the Country Office (CO) in Myanmar developed a Gender Action Plan enabling integration of gender equality and women's empowerment into all of its work and activities, and ensuring that the different food security and nutrition needs of women, men, boys and girls are addressed. Myanmar has been selected as one of WFP's pilot countries for the Award of Excellence in Gender Equality, designed to promote and recognize effective gender mainstreaming in WFP. This project translates the WFP Gender Policy into concrete standards, benchmarks and focused outputs around the gender work of CO. In 2015, WFP in Myanmar revised its current Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO), which scored 2A on the IASC Gender Marker. To obtain a 2A code, the implemented projects need to ensure that the situation and risk analysis include gender considerations, sex- and age-disaggregated data and qualitative information for each activity.

**Changing Gender Roles:** In March 2016, WFP in Myanmar conducted a gender analysis across its activities to contribute to the future programming and to support the integration of gender in the existing projects. Findings demonstrate that WFP food security and nutrition activities have contributed to achievements in gender equality and women's empowerment. In particular, WFP school feeding with daily nutritious High-Energy Biscuit snacks enables access to primary education for girls from remote rural food-insecure and particularly ethnic communities, breaking through the son bias. According to WFP Standard Project Report 2015, the attendance rate for girls and boys in WFP supported pre-primary and primary schools was gender balanced and remained high at 95 percent. In community assets creation programmes, awareness raising around gender equality and equal rights through equal wages for women and men have contributed to changing gender roles and perception of men as the sole breadwinner and therefore affecting decision making practices at a household. The interviewed women's groups expressed their satisfaction with being able to contribute equally to the household income and improve their food consumption.

**Making a Difference in the Daily Activities:** From 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December 2015 (Human Rights Day), WFP staff in Myanmar participated in the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign by coming to work in orange. The Orange Campaign encouraged WFP to support a brighter, violence free future for women and girls. At the same time, the campaign sparked momentum within WFP in Myanmar for enhancing the knowledge and awareness about gender issues in humanitarian food assistance context. By May 2016, all WFP staff have successfully completed the IASC Different Needs-Equal Opportunities training to increasing effectiveness of humanitarian action for women, men, girls and boys.

**Building Capacity with the Government:** WFP is committed to supporting the Government of Myanmar to reach its transformational goal of the Middle Income Country status by 2030 with zero hunger challenge one of its key

prerequisites. Since August 2015, WFP has partnered with Ministry of Education to employ school feeding as a social safety net and to advocate for strengthening the education sector with the objective of nationalizing the school feeding programme. Investing in the education of boys and girls transforms lives and subsequently breaks the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Better nourished and educated women and adolescent girls marry later, while their children are healthier and better educated.

**Voice from the Field:** Aye Aye Maw lives with her husband, two young daughters and ailing mother in Pa Khan Nge village of Magway Region. She and her husband are workhands who earn living with various seasonal jobs. Last year, her husband fell ill, and she is now the only breadwinner in the family. "Here, wages for casual labour are different for men and women. Female workers receive hardly the half of what men do", explains Aye Aye Maw. "It is very hard to support the entire family with such a low pay and alone". Severe floods in August 2015 destroyed farmlands in the region, which were the main source of employment for hundreds of thousands of people, including Aye Aye Maw's household. In support of early recovery activities for flood affected populations, WFP in partnership with Organization for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement (OISCA) phased in a productive community assets rehabilitation project through cash-based transfers, in Pa Khan Nge, providing Aye Maw and other vulnerable people with an income generating opportunity during this difficult period. "It was unbelievable that I could participate in the village road construction project as a female heading the household, which is very uncommon, and, moreover received compensation equal to men's", happily exclaims Aye Aye Maw. "I feel so proud and empowered that I participated in this WFP's project, which also allowed me to earn MMK 126,000 sufficient to buy two bags of rice, send my daughters to school and cover my husband's medical expenses. With the remaining money, I bought a pig, which is now an additional source of income for my family." Women and schoolchildren among other villagers could particularly benefit from the new village road built through WFP assets creation project. They can now conveniently carry water and commute by bicycle to other villages to sell things while children can safely go to school using the road.



Aye Aye Maw with the pig she purchased with her extra income

