

Gender Gap and Women's Political Participation in Burma/Myanmar

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Abstract

Women's political participation and representation vary dramatically within and between countries. This paper selectively reviews the literature on gender gap and women's participation in politics, focusing on women's formal political participation particularly from 2010 general election in Burma/Myanmar. The paper discusses, however, various barriers and challenges including traditional, religion, lack of education, experience in public discussion, participation and more importantly the military drafted 2008 constitution for women's political participation and representation in Burma/Myanmar. It also explains significance of women's political participation as well as the role of international mechanisms and gender quotas particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Electoral Quotas System for empowering women's participation in politics. Then, it explores the gap between the 2008 Constitution and the CEDAW standards. Throughout the review, the paper demonstrates a very low level of women's political participation from secondary data as well as in-depth interviewed with women parliamentarians explained the challenges and difficulties for women participation in politics of decision-making. It also reveals the most common mechanism for increasing women's political participation—quotas and in order to have an effective the gender electoral quotas system it is explicitly important both men and women attend training and skills development. Importantly, the paper also asks what degree and under what conditions elected women actually do represent women and contribute to gender equality, democracy and whether women are distinctive—does having more women in office make a difference to public policy?

Introduction

Burma/Myanmar¹ as a country with multiethnic population has been undergone for decade's long history of civil war² under successive different governments including the military dictatorship³. The

¹ Hereinafter "Myanmar/Burma" shall be referred to as "Burma". The reason is that the junta in Burma changed the country to "Myanmar" on 26 May, 1989. The ethnic leaders, armed groups, democracy movement and students, however, continue to refer to the country as "Burma" saying that the military regime had no mandate to change the country's name. In this paper, "Burma" is therefore used instead "Myanmar".

² Burma gained independence on 4 January 1948 but shortly afterwards the ethnic nationalities took up arms to fight for democracy, human rights and self-determination.

Burmese military government had referendum in 2008 to endorse its own Constitution and held the first ever general election in 2010 after two decades. Burma, since then, opens to a democratic country and has been gradually developing under the new government. At the present, the country is under the so-called quasi-civilian democratic government lead by President U Thein Sein. However, it still remained one of world's least developed countries (Zaw, 2014) and lowest women participation in politics. The problem here is the 2008 Constitution and 2010 general election had no guarantee to women's participation in politics where more than half the country's populations are women with 51.8 percent according to 2014 census (UNFPA, 2015).

The military governments have contrarily made a propaganda on women participation in politics or decision-making in Burma. They asserted that some of the historic experiences and the present measures could be considered to highlight a high degree of equality in Burma and women are having the opportunities to actively participate in politics. In the same way, Minoletti (2014) also states, in 1935 Burma turned to be the second country in what is now ASEAN⁴ countries where women have the right to vote in election. Since then women have had constitutional rights of equal participation in politics. However, this paper discussed with the available documents that show women's meaningful participation and representation in politics remains still very low in Burma. The paper also argues the several forms of discrimination against women including the 2008 constitution which relates to the limitation of women's ability to have participation in politics and extremely needed to amend. The paper addresses the roles of Burmese women in the society and their positions in politics where their participation is still very low.

What is Women's Participation in Politics?

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country. It has been argued that where women are fully represented, societies are more peaceful and stable (UN, 1995). Women's participation in politics in this paper refers to the political participation among Burmese women in the national, subnational levels, primarily female representation in the *Hluttaw*⁵ (Parliament) focusing on figures and involvement. This fairly includes women participation in local level of politics which is the state level legislative assembly also known as the *State or Region Hluttaw* but will not discuss in details for now. Perhaps, women's participation in politics not directly help to increase the gender equality but empower women to evolve in decision making and promote women-friendly policy change. The empowerment, autonomy and improvement of women's social, economic, political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government as well as the administration and sustainable development in all areas of life (Peltomäki, 2002 cited UN, 1995). Consequently, women in power will, more or less, greater opportunities for girls' education, health

³The Burma's parliamentary democracy period was ended in 1962, after the military lead by General Ne Win took over the country in a coup.

⁴ASEAN stands for Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Myanmar became member in 1997.

⁵According to 2008 Constitution, Burma's parliament or Pyidaungsu Hluttaw is consist of two houses; the Upper House or House of Nationalities is a 224-seat known as Amyotha Hluttaw as well as the Lower House or House of Representatives is a 440-seat known as Pyithu Hluttaw. Other states and regions level also have their own assembly or Hluttaw.

and equality. Women's political participation is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interest to be taken into account. In relation with this, the justice argument on women's participation in politics, therefore, claims that women have right to half of the seats since they make up half of the population. The experience argument holds that women have different experiences, either biologically or socially constructed, that should be represented as well (Delys, 2014). Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective in different level of governance system, political goals, gender and social equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. It is very clear that achieving maximum participation of women in politics will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. Indeed, women's political participation is fundamental for gender equality and their representation in positions of leadership must be a priority for all level of governments. Women are largely under-represented in decision-making and leadership positions in Burma which this paper will discuss in detail later. Women's mere participation in mainstream politics cannot automatically lead to their advancement and gender equality unless the contradiction in the development claim for equality and justice and the practice is eliminated. The level and nature of participation is equally important to determine whether women are able to share political gain. Interestingly, Bari (2005) found that nine out of twelve countries where women hold more than 33 percent of the seats in parliament are ranked high in the human development category (girls are more likely to have access to education, lower illiteracy rates, etc.).

Challenges of Women's Participation in Politics in Burma

Historically and religiously in Burma, the Buddhist Sangha⁶ have excluded women since the 13th century, and women are considered spiritually lower than men in the Burmese Buddhism. The Buddhist nuns are considered to be spiritually below monks, and only men are believed to be capable of attaining Buddha-hood (Belak, 2002). In this context, the concept of *hpone* is important in Burmese Buddhist communities— *hpone* is an abstract quality that all men are believed to possess that places them on a higher spiritual level; and while certain women are also considered to possess *hpone* this is to a much lesser degree. It is feared to loss men's *hpone* and believed that certain women's activities or manners can pollute/reduce men's *hpone*. Some sort of domestic works, such as washing and ironing women's and men's longyis together, or women repairing a roof, are thought by many to reduce men's *hpone* (Minoletti, 2014). So this kind of norms that prescribe for women and girls also affect their ability to participate in politics. Also, it is still a believed in the majority Burmese Buddhist societies and some of the ethnics' area such as Shan and Arakan as well that women are inferior to men. Therefore, they consider that women's role should be different from men. In relation to this believe, an international organization Action-Aid's study also found that women's role in religion, social and culture practices were typically welcoming guests, decorating and preparing food. Whereas men were responsible for the leadership and management of many

⁶*Sangha*, is a word in Pali and Sanskrit meaning "association", "assembly," "company" or "community" and most commonly refers in Buddhism to the monastic community of ordained Buddhist monks or nuns. Buddhist monastic order, according to Britannica, traditionally composed of four groups: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The *Sangha* is a part—together with the Buddha and the dharma (teaching)—of the Threefold Refuge, a basic creed of Buddhism.

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activities. In these areas, those who are having contrasting opinion on women's leadership often invoked the concept of *hpone* to justify their views. But then again in contrast, some ethnic states who mainly embrace the Christianity such as the Kachin and Chin women have a much bigger chance for participating in the public life at the present with compare to other Buddhist dominated states or regions in Burma. However, in the traditional or animist society of those states the Kachin and Chin also had a highly excluded practice for women participating in public life which also still have more or less impacted on their culture norms today.

Currently, the challenge facing all advocates of gender equality in politics today is the wide gap between shared values reflected in the national policies and practices. Moreover, Burma's 2008 Constitution does not guarantee gender equality. Though the section 347 and 348 of the 2008 Constitution guarantee the legal equality of all citizens, prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex and section 249 ensures equal opportunities in public employment, occupation and section 350 provides for equal pay for equal work. Contrarily to these sections, the constitution requires the president has a military 'vision or outlook'(Constitution, 2008). This clause is widely understood to mean experience within the Burma military, which excludes the vast majority of female and parliamentarians. Another tricky one is the constitution does not define what constitutes discrimination against women or describe direct and indirect discrimination. The problem is a section 352 of the constitution specifically refers to "position that are suitable for men only"(Constitution, 2008). This explicitly suggests women do not have right to choices for what they want to do for their professional career because of the constitution and the social norms. The constitution also does not provide any guarantees of substantive equality clauses describing temporary special measures or affirmation actions that may be taken to increase women's participation in traditionally male-dominated fields of politics. But the constitution gives a permanent role for the military in the country's political administration, guaranteeing that 25% of the seats of both houses of the Parliament held by military personnel (Constitution, 2008). In actual, where women are practically excluded from military services in Burma.

The other challenges are, for instance, feminist theories argued that patriarchy system of traditional practice have men's presence and dominance over women that is the prime obstacle to women's equality in the political institution. Amongst other things, such as lack of education, skills, confidence, as well as time constraints for women are the reason they are far from politics. Besides, it is very essential that both genders have experience in politics so that they have the ability to implicitly participate but the problem is women in Burma are still lacking in this matters. There are several other things that constraint and challenge women to participate in politics. Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin, the independent lawmaker in the Yangon Region parliament and who is among one of just six women in the Hluttaw out of 123 MPs said that in Myanmar, "women are not favoured by the [political] system, and their weakness is that they are not interested in taking [leadership] positions but instead are ready to serve others" (Nyein, 2014). As an independent woman lawmaker, she is fast becoming an icon for young women who are ambitious to be leader in their future.

A teacher-turned the first Chin women lawmaker Pi Za Tlem at the Amyotha Hluttaw also said that most women are afraid of politics for many reasons. She said during the personal interview, "They just don't believe in the government. Since, we hardly have election in our country" with different

views from other women lawmaker. For instance, amongst many challenges, women simply fear when we say the term or word politics. Women, particularly in ethnic minority areas do not understand what a politic is. Traditionally in this area, women are responsible for households and family matters, therefore even if they understand about politics they are indecisive whether to participate in decision-making process. On the other hand, lack of trust in the military-back government which hold the 2010 election and lack of support from the family members and other communities are another reasons for women not participate in politics.⁷ These are some of the challenges and difficulties that bar women to participate in politics. The government, therefore, should give an open door for women to participate in politics or give more opportunity and encouragement to women for most women frightened to involve in politics. It is arguably reasonable that most women are afraid of even the word politics because of the above mentioned reasons including their lack of skills, experiences and so on besides their mistrust of the military back-up government.

Dr. Nyo also said, the other male parliamentarians do not listen to women in the parliamentary process when asking about the challenges and difficulties in parliament where there is only 6 per cent of women participation in the country parliament. From her own experience, the present political system prefer men and they do not want women to be in any particular committee in parliament even after they are elected by the people. For instance, women are not included in Law Reform Committee and she was also rejected for the same though she has a Ph D degree in Law because of being an opposition to the current ruling government as well as a woman lawmaker. The other problem she mentioned is that women parliamentarian are threaten by other colleagues who are mostly military-turn-civilian parliamentarian and the very basic thing is the military attitude is not changed yet. This is the reason why women participation is very low and women participants in decision-making position still facing a lot of challenges and difficulties⁸. During interview with the *mizzima*, she gives important example inside the assembly where the military attitude still presence. The speaker of the Yangon region assembly was junior to the Chief Minister and served him in his army days. So, sometimes it happens that during Hluttaw sessions the speaker will ask the chief minister for permission (Hulst, 2014). She said, that is not according to the law. According to the law, we only have to obey our own regulations, we don't have to ask the chief minister for his opinion. It happens often that the region government makes objections to our activities, for example when we wanted to form a parliamentary committee to check the government. The response from both Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin and Pi ZaTlem have shown clearly the present situation and challenges why women's political participation in Burma is still very low. It can also be argued that the military and the military-turned civilian MPs attitude toward women, particularly in their participation in politics.

Gender and Politics: The Current State of Women's Participation in Burma's Government Structures

⁷ Pi Za Tlem, a women MP from Chin State in the Amyotha Hluttaw, personal interview 5 July, 2015.
Interviewer: Sang Hnin Lian

⁸Nyo Nyo Thin, Doctor, the independent lawmaker in the Yangon Region Hluttaw, personal question & answer at MSAA Alumni Meet, 6 June, 2015. Questioner: Sang Hnin Lian

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Women's participation in elections at the national level Hluttaw is extremely low. In the first general election in 2010 after decades, it was very explicit that women candidates accounted for only about 4% of all the candidates. In the existing Burma's Parliament or Pyitaungsu Hluttaw, women representation is less than 6% of the total elected members of the houses—Amyotha Hluttaw and Pyithu Hluttaw. Women's representation falls to 4.42% when military appointees are accounted for both the houses. Particularly, women are poorly represented in the Amyotha Hluttaw or Upper House accounting for only 1.79% of the representatives in that chamber (IPU, 2014; PTE & GEN, 2012). Women's participation as MPs and Ministers is also very low. There are only two ministries out of a total 33 lead by women that is the ministry of education and the ministry of social welfare, relief and resettlement.

The numbers of women's participation in the legislative assembly at the regions and states level are even lower than it is at the national level. In the region and state assemblies, there are only 25 women lawmakers present that is just 2.83% out of the total numbers of the members 883 state and region level MPs in Burma. In addition, there are only 4 women ministers out of the 169 region and state ministries that is again only account 2.37%. Unfortunately, there is state and region assemblies that do not have female lawmaker at the assembly (Hluttaw). They are Chin State, Kayah State, Kayin State, Mon States; and Sagaing and Tanintharyi Regions). The state and region parliaments that have women ministers are the Kachin State Minister for Social Affairs; and, the Minister for Shan National Race Affairs, the Yangon Region Minister for Finance; and the Irrawaddy Region Minister for Social Affairs (PTE & GEN, 2012; Minoletti, 2014). This lack of participation in politics or decision-making at local and high level positions is showing remarkably that women are not well present in politics or government structures though they make up half of the country population with 51.8 percent (UNFPA, 2015).

The reason for not women's participate in politics may be wide-ranging. It is argued that in order to have a meaningful participation in politics or governance both men's and women's education, skills, experience all matters but it is limited to women in Burma. So this needs to be made changes and improvements through increasing the formal education systems by allowing women to participate freely and openly in the public life so that they will have a better experience and expectation for their life. Women's role should not be limited but encourage their participation in public discussion as well as politics. The important step for improvement of the women's political participation is to focus on solving the basic issues, problems, and develop their capacity as well as adopt particular system for women. In doing so, there may be numerous tools and instruments for increasing women's political participation in Burma by using, for example as many countries adopted, the gender electoral quotas system to have more women's presence in the Hluttaw. The quotas system, which will be discussed detail later, is the most common tool or instrument that reserved number of seats or mandatory percentage for women to increase their participation in politics in election. However, women's political participation need to go beyond numbers and their participation must have a meaningful impact in public life. It is also important to understand how much an elected women actually do present women in the society. It is also need to access to what degree and under what conditions elected women actually contribute to gender equality and democracy. In other words, how are elected women making difference? Therefore, elected women's presence in the Hluttaw or other office is not enough there need to be input to make something different.

Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): Substantive Equality as Women Empowerment in Burma

Nearly 40 years had already passed since the United Nations' General Assembly (UNGA) declared the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) with special sub-themes—equality, development and peace (UNGA, 1985; Kausar, 2000). Although democracy being accepted in most society including Burma, discrimination still remain; especially when we talk about gender equality and its manifestation in the various areas of societal participation—public and private spheres. The elimination of gender discrimination relates on how practically proceed on eradication of gender inequality in various societies in achieving the 'Substantive Equality', one of the three models of equality adopted by CEDAW. It is a model asserts that (1) at times, women need to be treated differently to achieve equal results, and, (2) if there is something that disadvantages women—social, economic, cultural, politics and so on—the State has the primary obligation to correct such situation to make sure equal results for women. It needs to ensure that women have equal opportunity, equal access to opportunities and equal results (Torres, 2009).

Interestingly, Burma is also party to the Convention on the Elimination of all form of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)—which commits countries to eliminate discrimination against women both in law and practice. The article one of CEDAW emphasizes that discrimination is prohibited whether its authors are state or private actors. The article two enjoins the government to create policies and law that will eliminate discrimination. But then again, the tricky thing is the Burma 2008 constitution does not explain what is and what includes discrimination based on gender or describe direct and indirect discrimination. The article three ensures action to advance equality and guarantee fundamental right and freedoms and article four is about the temporary special measure to accelerate achievement of equality via the provisions of its constitution is guaranteeing women exclusion. On the other hand, the constitution requires the president has a military 'vision or outlook' and specifically refers 'position that are suitable for men only' as mentioned earlier. Then, all the articles of CEDAW stand for promotion and protection of women rights. However, as mentioned above, women's participation in Burma's government structures is very low and the institution mechanisms for addressing gender discrimination in Burma extremely limited. The fundamental principles of the 2008 Constitution includes provisions that effectively exclude women from public office. Moreover, the government is far from introducing temporary special measures that would assist women in realizing equality. This paper try not to explain the CEDAW in details but highlight the important point and the gap in comparison with the Burmese military drafted 2008 Constitution.

Gap between the 2008 Constitution and the CEDAW standard

This is undeniable that women played virtually no role in the constitution-drafting process where they could have made some input of women friendly-policy aligned with CEDAW standard. The absence of women from political life and decision-making positions undermined democracy and women's empowerment. As the experience argument for women's political participation asserted,

Nesreen Barwari, Minister of Municipalities and Public Works of Iraq, also noted in the UN meeting that the real reason women should be engaged in politics at all levels was not to emulate men, but to bring a unique feminine perspective to bear on the decision-making process (UN, 2006). In responses to the gap between constitution and standard, the government created the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) on the path to eliminating discrimination against women both in law and in practice for ten years (Irrawaddy, 2013). It is a direct response to a number of the issues raised by the 2008 review. As in 2008, the CEDAW Committee drew attention to a number of areas in which Burma's implementation of the convention was lacking. They have been implementing the program, but their inadequate implementation has resulted in the neglect of several key elements of the CEDAW committee's recommendations (CEDAW, 2008). In short, Women in Burma do not enjoy an effective constitutional guarantee of "Substantive Equality". Several issues that the CEDAW Committee raised in its concluding observations on Burma are also yet to fulfil. So, with the issue of gender equality prevailing in this contemporary world, the Burma should also consider adopting equal rights, opportunities for the women in every aspect. There is extremely needed to amend some of 2008 Constitution in align with CEDAW standard and give space women for their participation in politics. Hence, reflecting the gap between the 2008 constitution and CEDAW standard in term of gender equality, it is not only important to amend the constitution but it is also need to realize men have an important role to play in improving women's status. Men also have the responsibility to play a substantial role in promoting the gender equality policy development. As allies, they can support women's initiatives and movements in their efforts towards equality. It is also believe that women's political participation is a crucial element for promoting a more democratic and just society. Perhaps there are various mechanisms, in order to make increase women's participation in politics as mentioned earlier, but this paper wants to focus on a mechanism known as electoral quotas system for current Burma's situation.

Quotas System for Empowering Women's Participation in Politics

As stated earlier, women's level of representation in subnational and national politics is very low in Burma that is the both houses at the national level Hluttaw and the Assembly at the states and regions level. This paper have also discussed the various barriers and challenges and the importance of women's participation in politics. Women's political participation might not directly help to increase the gender equality but it is important that they are empowered and evolved in the decision-making process. In doing so, one potential means to increase women's participation is government-mandated quotas system that stipulate a minimum number of seats at a given level(s) of government (e.g. ward/village tract administrators, state and region parliament, etc.) to be reserved for women, or that political parties must field a minimum percentage of women candidates in elections. Two members of the ASEAN community (Indonesia and Philippines) have already introduced such laws, as have many other Asian countries, including Bangladesh, China, East Timor, India, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Nepal and Pakistan (Minoletti, 2014). The practices from around the world shows that the electoral quotas system have had quick response in increasing women's political participation. The increase in women's political participation in some countries is partly because of the implementation of electoral quotas system in particular country.

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In fact, Burma's National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women calls for the Application of quota systems to guarantee women's political participation such as in the legislative, judicial, and executive bodies. However, U Soe Maung, Union Minister at the President's Office, has rejected the need for quotas in Burma, claiming that they are unnecessary given that there is traditionally very little gender discrimination in Burma (Pyithu Hluttaw, 2013). However, this paper argues discrimination based on gender still continues to some considerable extent in the Burma society generally at the present, and that women's participation in politics especially in the Hluttaw remains tremendously low. Thus, in order to increase women political participation, it is important to take serious effort to adopt the electoral quotas system which will allow and encourage women to participate more in politics freely without any fears. This system is also favoured by many people in Burma including the activist, NGOs workers, and women politicians and so on. For instance, a woman independent lawmaker from Yangon, Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin, formerly unknown in public life believes "women have much more potential than what people think." Then, she is also a strong supporter of an electoral quota system of at least 30 percent female participation in the three branches of government (Nyein, 2014).

On the other hand, an ethnic Chin woman lawmaker at Amyotha Hluttaw Pi Tlem said with her own ethnic perspective that even if women have a 30% of seats reserved in the parliament, we may not be able to fully get them all since many of them afraid to take part in politics and do not have the capacity. Particularly, most women in ethnic's area have no interest in politics and they also do not understand politics well. Moreover, women are likely to face dilemma whether participate in politics since women traditionally have to take responsibility in family and household matters despite many other things. It seems politics or taking apart in decision-making is a new field to us, for instance, in 2010 general election there were only 3 Chin women candidates from three parties. This explicitly shows that having a 30% reserved seats in the parliament or in the government only will not improve the women participation. There is a huge demand from the bottom to improving women and girls education, develop their capacity as well as training for women to understand politics better. This needs to be initiated and implemented by the government with the help from local non-governmental organization working for women's rights. However, that does not mean that we do not need a 30% seats reserved but what is also important is develop women capacity. Then, what is also very important is not only the government but also the family members and communities needed to understand, create more space and opportunities for girls and women⁹.

Political quotas for women can be introduced at any level of government (e.g. national level, state and region, district, township, or ward/village). Quotas have now been introduced in many countries around the world, and have had a large causal effect in raising the number of women in government. Quotas for women are typically intended not only to raise the number of women in government (Aili M. T., and Alice K. 2008; Haider, 2011). Common additional aims of quotas include: increasing women's experience and confidence to take on governance roles; increase the political engagement of women constituents and citizens; increase the responsiveness of government decision-making to women's preferences; and promote policies targeted at gender equity and equality. Many countries with quotas have achieved these broader goals, but a considerable number have not (Haider, 2011).

⁹ Pi Za Tlem, a women MP from Chin State in the Amyotha Hluttaw, personal interview 5 July, 2015.
Interviewer: Sang Hnin Lian

Thus, if a quota system is to be introduced to Burma, it is essential that this is designed carefully, to ensure that gains are maximized. This system is the most useful tool and instrument for improvement and increasing women's political participation. In order for electoral quotas to be effective, both women and men need access to training and skills development. In the short term, According to Division for the Advancement of Women of New York, quotas may dramatically increase the representation of women, but they allow parties to make concessions to women without necessarily addressing critical gender equality issues (DAW, 2005). However, as mentioned it is important that women in Burma are encouraged by the system. Therefore, political quotas of at least 30 per cent for women need to be adopted through the parliament in law and practice. At the same time, the government needs to improve and practice an open doors system which means giving more opportunities for women and in order for them to participate they [government] need to have a capacity development program for girls and women.

Conclusion

To conclude this paper, we can say that there is very limited number of female representation in politics even in the present quasi-civilian democratic government in Burma. Though, the government has ratified CEDAW and set up NSPAW in order to promote rights, strengthen equality and women's participation in politics as stated, due to lack of education, experience in public discussion and participation, tradition practices, and many other things are not fulfil by the Burma government for women to get equal result and opportunities. Women's leadership also has been found to be especially strongly resisted in the spheres of politics, religion, and in traditional cultural activities/societies. Women's time constraints represent another major barrier to their increased participation in governance because of the amount of time women spend on household labor especially in Burma. A lack of confidence to contribute to public decision-making prevents many women from trying to take on leadership roles. This lack of confidence arises to a considerable extent from traditional cultural norms that associate women with the household sphere, and men with the public sphere. These norms also mean that women who are in governance can face resentment from men and have difficulty getting their voices heard. These are the reasons behind that made women's participation less in politics. The government has established NSPAW recently and other national action plan for women, but they fail to implement in the reality. The lack of political will and the lack of concrete implementation of CEDAW, NSPAW, Laws, and other strategic plans are major reasons behind lower women's political participation and the legislative (constitution) reform is required to bring the body of Burma's laws into greater compliance with the CEDAW. The new laws also need strengthen existing provisions in the Constitution and provide a definition of discrimination that harmonizes with the CEDAW, while creating institutions to enforce penalties for discrimination. It is vital that any process of amendment should be undertaken with the direct input of women and women's organizations, other stakeholder groups in the community, as well as legal experts and government officials. It is also indispensable to recognize that culture is not static but capable of adapting to new understanding of women's status and rights. In the process, men have an important role to play in improving women's political participation and can also play a crucial role in promoting gender equality policy.

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