



# Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation: Women Lead in Emergencies

Northern Shan State, Myanmar

**CARE International in Myanmar**

November 2022



## **Acknowledgements**

The views in this Rapid Gender Analysis on Power & Participation are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of the CARE or its programs, the Danish government or other partners.

## Contents

Abbreviations .....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction .....	6
Objectives of the Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation (RGA-P) .....	
Background to the conflict in Myanmar.....	
Demographic profile .....	
Methodology .....	
Women’s Participation and Leadership in Lashio Township, Shan State, Myanmar .....	9
Governance, decision-making and accountability structures in Lashio Township.....	9
Women’s organisations, groups, and activists.....	10
Barriers to women’s participation and leadership in decision-making in Lashio Township.....	12
Risks from supporting women’s participation and leadership in Lashio Township.....	13
Promising directions for Women Lead in Emergencies in Lashio Township.....	14
Gaps and areas for further research .....	14
Conclusions .....	

## Abbreviations

WLIE	Women Lead in Emergencies
RGA-P	Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organizations
MAF	Myanmar Armed Forces
CSO	Civil Society Organization
GAD	General Administrative Department
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
KII	Key Informant Interviews

## Executive Summary

On 01 February 2020, the Myanmar military, the Tatmadaw, led a coup, seizing power and declaring a state of emergency for one year and effectively ended the democratic transitions being made under the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi.<sup>1</sup> The NLD was poised to return to another five years after a landslide win in the general election in November 2020. Instead under the military State Administration Councils (SAC) junta led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, soldiers and police rounded up hundreds of members of parliament, including Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD party members and held them in arbitrary detention for months and many of them in undisclosed location.<sup>2</sup> After the coup, the military handed power to the army chief, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing.<sup>3</sup>

As of December 2022, there are 1.4 million internally displaced people (IDP) in Myanmar.<sup>4</sup> Over 40,000 people remain in neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Thailand, and India since the takeover. More than 18,058 civilian properties, including houses, churches, monasteries, and schools are estimated to have been destroyed during hostilities, although figures are difficult to verify. The level of destruction of civilian properties, particularly homes, combined with the seemingly never-ending fighting will very likely prolong the displacement of the IDPs and would further deteriorate their already fragile living conditions. The current volatile security situation and its associated restrictions, such as bureaucratic processes, systematic blocks on access approvals, continue to hamper humanitarian access and delay the delivery of assistance.

The purpose of this Rapid Gender Analysis on Power & Participation (RGA-P) is to build a better understanding as to whether and how women are able to participate in the community and in decision making spaces in the Northern Shan State of Myanmar and what changes may have occurred as a result of the conflict and women's participation and leadership. The research was conducted through primary and secondary data collection in July 2022 in three villages in the Lashio Township of the Northern Shan State, Myanmar.

### Summary of the findings

The main factors that were found to restrict women's access and opportunity to participate in public decision making and leadership roles were related to

- Social norms and expectations of the role women are expected to play/hold in society and the views that female characteristics are not fit for leadership roles.
- The expectation that women are responsible for all of the household chores, childcare and care for elderly.
- Restrictions on women's movement (controlled by husbands and elder family members) also impedes women's rights to engage in spaces outside of the home.
- In addition, barriers such a slow literacy rates in Myanmar language (the language used is most formal meetings/decision making spaces)

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-coup-d-tat-dg-echo-echo-daily-flash-01-february-2021>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/myanmar-burma>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/article/myanmar-news-protests-coup.html>

<sup>4</sup> OCHA Humanitarian Update. Myanmar. Dec 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-24-3-december-2022>

## Introduction

This Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation (RGA-P) is part of the Women Lead in Emergencies (WLiE) project in Northern Shan State in Myanmar. This project is funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) to support crisis-affected women to participate in more meaningful ways in community and public life and in the humanitarian response in Lashio Township. This analysis compliments a Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) done by CARE Myanmar in 2021 which focused on gender broadly within the humanitarian context in Myanmar, this RGA-P focuses on women's meaningful participation and leadership in public decision-making spaces.

## Objectives of the Rapid Gender Analysis on Power & Participation (RGA-P)

An RGA-P assesses the impact of crisis on gender, power relations and women's/girl's participation and leadership, the barriers for women's meaningful participation.

The main objectives of the RGA-P are to:

- ✓ Analyze crisis-affected women's and girl's meaningful participation in different decision-making process.
- ✓ Identify the practical entry points for women and girls to meaningful participation in decision making in Lashio Township
- ✓ Identify gaps for further assessment and analysis to build more comprehensive understanding women's/girl's participation and leadership in Lashio Township

## Background of the Lashio Township, Northern Shan State

Since 2009, Northern Shan has seen regular and continuous armed clashes between ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and the Myanmar armed forces (MAF), despite the unilateral ceasefire that was put in place by MAF first in 2019 and later extended until October 2020 due to COVID-19. The sporadic and mobile nature of clashes caused continuous cycles of temporary displacement of families across the region, and this, along with the presence of landmines and unexploded ordinances hindered opportunities for safe and durable solutions for civilians in protracted displacement.

In Shan State, sporadic armed clashes between the MAF and EAOs were also reported in several townships of northern Shan, particularly in Kutkai, Muse and Namtu townships, throughout April and May. According to initial reports by partners and the de facto Department of Disaster Management (DDM), 23 people have been killed and another 41 people injured as a result of 65 armed clashes between MAF and EAOs during clashes and other hostilities the state Shan since the beginning of 2022.

In southern Shan, sources indicated that more than 500 residents in Ywagnan township have fled into the forest seeking safety amid MAF reinforcement in the area since 22 April. Along with this ongoing displacement across Kachin and Shan states, there have been some reports of modest IDP returns to their places of origins in April. Approximately 1,800 IDPs in Shan and about 1,000 IDPs in Kachin have returned to their places of origin since early April 2022.<sup>5</sup> Civilian property destruction (homes, schools, etc.) and a deteriorating security situation, including explosive ordinance risks has prolonged civilian displacement.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-18-31-may-2022>

This is compounded by the fact that there are heavy restrictions on humanitarian access delaying the provision of life saving humanitarian assistance from international agencies. Local organizations continue to operate and support their communities with aid but also face bureaucratic and security challenge and delays. Women and girls have long faced discrimination in Myanmar, but this has been exacerbated as a result of the ongoing conflict. Protection risks including S/GBV and domestic violence for women and girls continues to be a major concern, with economic constraints and high inflation along with increased drug and alcohol use contributing to security and livelihood risks.<sup>6</sup>

Women reported having little to no decision-making power in their homes and feeling excluded from contributing to decisions related to the future of their families. At the same time, due to drug use among displaced men, women are also taking on roles traditionally “assigned” to husbands as “protectors” and “providers” for their family. These new roles women are taking on is on top of the existing care work in the home which they are expected to manage. Although men may not be fulfilling their traditional roles, they still have a privileged position over female partners in the home and there is still the expectation that women are to be obedient to their husbands.

High rates of forced male recruitment (including forced recruitment of boys) and gendered informal income generating opportunities have resulted in a lower ratio of men in IDP camps over time. This has resulted in increasing space for women to assume public leadership roles, for example in camp management committees, however this has not transpired and there has not been a substantive shift in gender norms in support of women’s rights.<sup>7</sup>

## Demographic Profile

The 2014 Myanmar population and Housing census (census) recorded a total population size of 50,279,900 (Male: 24,228,714; Female 26,051,186). And the total fertility rate is 2.5 for the whole nation and for the Shan state is 3.1. Average house-hold size for Shan state is 4.7.<sup>8</sup>

Total population of Shan state is 5,824,432 (Males: 2,910,710; Females: 2,913,722). In Shan state, 81.7 % of the population practice Buddhism, 9.8% Christianity, 6.6% Animism, 1.0% Islam, 0.1% Hinduism, 0.5% other religion, and 0.4% non-religion. The percentage of male and female who completed primary level as highest-level education are 24.2% (male) and 19.1% (female). The percentage of female and male who completed high school level 5.3% (male) 4.2% (female). The percentage of male and female who completed University as a highest-level education 3.5% (male) 4.5% (female). The participation of male and female labor force shows male are more and female are less in (88.6% male, 66.4% female)<sup>9</sup>. In Shan State many languages are spoken, including Burmese, Kachin, Shan, Wa, Palaung/ Ta’aung, and Lahu as the most common.

---

<sup>6</sup> OCHA Humanitarian Update. Myanmar. Dec 2022 <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-24-3-december-2022>

<sup>7</sup> Page 19, Gender Profile for humanitarian action: Rakhine, Kachin, Northern Shan and Kayin states, Myanmar, Volume 3, issued June 2021, Gender in Humanitarian Action Workstream- UNFPA, UNWOMEN

<sup>8</sup> The 2014 Myanmar population and Housing Census, Thematic report on population dynamics, census report Volume 4-E

<sup>9</sup> Census Atlas Myanmar, The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, page 9,22,26,44,54 table 2.1,2.7,2.8,4.4,4.5 , 4.6,5.2

## AGE DEMOGRAPHICS, Lashio Township

Lashio Township, Village (by Zone)	Age profile by village			Total Population
	Under 18 years old	Over 18-65 years old	65+ years	
Kone Nyone	243	264	52	1,059
Man Pyaing	Age disaggregated data not available			1,046
Pang Mun	52	104	21	177

*\*Gender disaggregated age data for villages not available*

## Methodology of the RGA-P

To carry out this RGA-P, a four (4) person (2 female, 2 male) assessment team from CARE's partner organization, Meikswe Myanmar, carried out primary data collection between July 15 -30, 2022. The assessment team received training on RGA-P data collection methods, followed by a second more detailed session on the themes explored through this analysis, best practices on data collection, and do no harm policies, including gender-based violence referral pathways specific for the assessment location. The **primary data collection** methods included: key informant interviews (KII), focus group discussions (FGD), storytelling, and community mappings. Data collection was done in Burmese (official language of Myanmar) and in the local dialects spoken by many of the villages, for which a local interpreter was used. **Secondary data** was collected from UN reports, CARE reports and other academic, INGO and reputable sources in order to validate and compliment findings from primary data collection.

This is the first RGA-P done in Lashio township and any gaps identified as needing further assessment will be noted at the end of the report and will be updated as information is collected on those gaps during implementation of the project activities.

There are a number of limitations to this research. As there was a small assessment team of only 4 individuals and the three villages were quite distance from one another, there was limited time to collect information in the community. Further to this, there were a number of military checkpoints the assessment team faced which limited their mobility and shortened time available for meetings.

The report's findings will be validated and updated through discussions with women's groups participating in the Women Lead in Emergencies (WLiE) pilot in each of the three villages where the assessment was conducted. Ethnicity of the respondents are Kachin, Kayin (limited), Chinese, Wa, Shan. Some respondents had 10<sup>th</sup> level education, and some had no education at all. There were mixed age groups and some FGDs were inclusive of people living with disabilities, including those with hearing, visual and physical impairments.

## PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION [See Annex for full details of data collection methods]

Village	Data Collection Method
Kone Nyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Key Informant Interview, Female</li> <li>(1) Key Informant Interview, Male</li> <li>(2) Focus Group Discussion, Female</li> <li>(1) Focus Group Discussion, Male</li> <li>(1) Community Mapping, Female &amp; Male</li> </ul>



	(1) Storytelling, Female
<b>Man Pyaing</b>	(2) Key Informant Interview, Female (1) Key Informant Interview, Male (2) Focus Group Discussion, Female (1) Focus Group Discussion, Male (1) Community Mapping
<b>Pang Mun</b>	(2) Key Informant Interview, Female (1) Key Informant Interview, Male (2) Focus Group Discussion, Female (1) Focus Group Discussion, Male (1) Community mapping, Female & Male (1) Storytelling, Female

## Women's Participation and Leadership in Man Pyaing village, Kone Nyone village, Pang Mun village in Lashio Township

Many challenges and barriers to women's meaningful participation and leadership in Lashio Township and the within the targeted villages. Even so, women are participating in a limited capacity in some public/community spaces yet are not often in a leadership position nor able to make or influence decisions. Some women are participating in village savings and loan associations (VSLAs), in village development committees, and as a parishioner in Pang Mun, while in Man Pyaing some women are taking on such as leaders of the Linn Let women's group and Suit Kyaing sewing groups. In groups or spaces where men are present, women are not able to hold leadership or decision-making roles with decisions being made by men, in particular by the village head, village committee head, and religious leaders.

*"Women can be leaders if they are in a women's group. But if there are men in any groups then women cannot participate in the leadership position" (26 years old, Female FGD- Kone Nyone village, Wa nationality with the primary education)*

Women account for only 19 of the 16,743 ward/village tract level administrators in government-controlled areas of Myanmar.<sup>10</sup> These 19 female ward/village tract administrators are found in Kayin State (9); Magway Region (5); Kachin State (2); Chin State (1); Tanintharyi Region (1); and Yangon Region (1). In total, women account for only 0.11% of all of the ward/village tract administrators in Myanmar [It is important to note that this data is for government-controlled areas of Myanmar only].<sup>11</sup>

## Governance, decision-making and accountability structures in Man Pyaing village, Kone Nyone village, Pang Mun village in Lashio Township

<sup>10</sup> Village Tract is the rural term equivalent to Ward for urban areas. Village Tracts are fourth level sub-divisions of Myanmar's rural townships.

<sup>11</sup> Women's Participation in the Sub National Governance of Myanmar, Sub National Governance in Myanmar, Paul Minoletii. Discussion paper No 3, June 2014. pp 11 ( [https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Womens-Participation-in-Subnational-Governance\\_Policy-brief\\_ENG.pdf](https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Womens-Participation-in-Subnational-Governance_Policy-brief_ENG.pdf))

There is substantial information documenting governance structures in Myanmar prior to the 2021 military coup, however, there is limited information on the new decision-making structures, both formal and informal and very little to none on that in Lashio Township. More information and analysis are needed on the current formal and informal decision-making structures given the military presence and breakdown of the formally elected government structures following the coup.

**Governance structures across the township** are separated into three levels: community/village level, track/ward level and township level general administrative department (GAD) authorities. Any actions taken at village level must be approved at track and township level and similarly if track or township GAD plan to implement actions in the village they must discuss with the village leadership. Village leadership is made up of Head of Households (HH), with some decision making influenced/made by village committees. Some committee members also serve as Village GAD leadership.

**Village Governance- Head of Households:** Within the village governance system, there are village tracts, each which are led by a Village Head and a corresponding administrative body.<sup>12</sup> If the village has over 100 households, then there will be a Village Head and Administrative body to lead the village decision making and governance system. If there are less than 100 households in a village, the leadership will be divided among 10 Head of Households who will work together as a local government council. The 10 Head of Households are not given as much authority as the 100 Head of Household leadership, due to the village size they represent. The majority of the Head of Households are men, with a few 10 Head of Households held by women.

**Village Committees:** There are a number of committees which operate at the village level and which report to the track and township level GAD. In some cases, committee members/leaders are also part of the village level GAD, in particular the Village Development Committee. Other committees identified include water, cultural and traditional association committees.

In Pang Mun, the cultural committee was formed by women with women holding positions of Patron, President, Secretary, Accountant, and Auditor. Leadership terms are for 3 years. When the term period is over, there will be proposal for selection and then the one who get the high proposal become the president. The village development committee in Pang Mun is made up of two women and five men, however only the men are given authority to make any decisions.

### **Women's organizations and groups in Man Pyaing village, Kone Nyone village, Pang Mun village in Lashio Township**

While there are a few women's groups/organizations identified in each of the villages, these groups do not currently provide the women with access to public decision-making spaces or leadership roles as the group role in the community is not influential enough as well as the fact that the group decisions are still influenced or determined by men in the community. Church based groups while being all female are beholden to the church, with all high-level decisions made by the church leadership, all men, and for some of the women's groups there is informal leadership of the military with decisions dictated to the group. In addition to the groups listed below, there are the village committees in which women participate which should be explored further.

#### **Women's groups**

**Sut Ring Women's VSLA (Pang Mun):** This group was formed by CARE's local partner, Meikwe Myanmar. Group leadership structure includes Patron, President, Secretary, Accountant, Auditor and

---

<sup>12</sup> [https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Municipal-Governance-in-Myanmar\\_Policy-Series\\_ENG.pdf](https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Municipal-Governance-in-Myanmar_Policy-Series_ENG.pdf)

general membership. There are 21 members, they meet once a month and repayment on funds borrowed is required after 3 months.

**Women's Youth group (Pang Mun):** The group is organized with one representative as the group leader, there are no other leadership positions within the group. The group is very informal and does not meet regularly but come together once in a while to volunteer and/or participate in certain events and activities within the village.

**Anti-drug women group (Pang Mun):** This group was formed by women from Pang Mun who have direct experience dealing with family (primarily husbands, sons) and friends who have struggled with drug abuse and addiction. Group activities include awareness raising on the harms of drug use. At times the group will request support from the Militia members from their community to penalize the drug offenders.

**Kone Nyone Star VSLA group (Kone Nyone):** This group was formed through the church and allows group and non-group community members to get loans with a low interest rate (2% for group members and 5% for non-group members). The leadership of the group consists of Patron (Pastor), President, Secretary, Accountant, Auditor and the members. There are 20 members in this VSLA group, though the women do not have final authority to make decisions and must consult with the church Priest.

**Lin Let women's group (Man Pyaing):** Group objectives including creating a platform for women's solidarity and empowerment and to serve as an informal referral pathway for access to domestic violence services. The group was formed 2021, with 11 female members of whom two act as leader and second leader of the group (determined by group elections) and 1 male member who holds an advisory position. At the moment all of the members are married women, some are selected by the village, and some nominate themselves to be part of this group.

**Sut Chyai Sewing Group (Man Pyaing):** This is a group formed under the church leadership to support women with income generating activities. The group leadership structure includes president, secretary, accountant, auditor, treasurer, marketing, and general membership. There is a five-person advisory board led by four male leaders from the church and one woman. Women interviewees noted that the group has not yet been effective in generating income for its members, but more information is needed to understand why.

**Mother groups (all villages):** These groups were formed under Church leadership. The women in these groups support people in the community that face health, mobility and other challenges and as a group, cover the cost for the health services of those individuals. There are around 10-25 members per group and consist of primarily married women, who also use these groups as a safe space to discuss the issues they are facing as women, wives, mothers, etc. The group also provides counselling support for the women in the group, but more information is needed to understand how that is structured and how the cost is covered.

**Church based women's group (all villages):** Through this group, members meet for religious purposes, but they also act as mediators in domestic violence disputes in the community, and if there is special event for women in the village this group will often be asked to support the event. The group also conducts activities to support women within IDP camps and carry out small income generating activities through the production and sale of snacks such as dumplings or soup. The group has authority to make minor decisions, but for larger and more important decisions, those are made by the Pastor of the Church. In this group, the leadership structure includes the Pastor, religious teacher, women chairperson, accountant, auditor and treasure etc. All of them are women except Pastor. The small decisions are made by the women, but the important decisions are done by the Pastor.

## Barriers to women's participation and leadership in decision-making in Man Pyaing village, Kone Nyone village, Pang Mun village in Lashio Township

While women officially have the same rights as men in Myanmar, in practice women's rights are violated, including their right to participate and influence the decisions that affect their lives.

**Social Norms / Perceptions of Women:** One of the main barriers that women face is the social norms that dictate women should not be leaders. Even while some women are taking on leadership roles in the community, men (and some women) still feel that leadership roles should be held by men. Many of the men from the FGD shared that even though women may have the capacity, women should not take the responsibility in the leadership roles. (FGD, Men, PM village). Some of the women noted themselves that even if they have the chance to take on a leadership role in the community, they will not accept it as it is the man's role.

Men are also judged by other men if they are seen to be supporting women as leaders, thus many men will not publicly support women in leadership roles. There is also a fear held by men that more women in leadership positions will mean there is less space for men to hold leadership positions.

Many men view female traits/characteristics as negative traits, and which make them [women] unfit for leadership roles. One of the male FGDs expressed that most women are talkative, and they make decision in a hurry and those decision are not good, while another man stated that he thinks that women cannot handle the responsibility of the village head.

One of the male respondents noted that there are a limited number of men who are listening to the voice of women, a statement confirmed by women from FGDs as well "my opinions are denied many times by others in the community, and I am tired of having to get my ideas accepted. (Female FGD group 1 PM village, age 53 years, uneducated person).

**Lack of confidence to speak out in the public spaces:** Most of the women from FGD and KIIs expressed that they lack confidence to speak out in the public spaces as they have no experience doing so and most of the time their voices as women are not respected and this leads to women feeling discouraged and shy. (Women FGD- MP, Women FGD- Kyone 1, Woneb FGD- Kyone Nyone 2).

**Literacy rates:** Many of the women from the FGDs expressed that one of the key barriers to their participation is language skills. Most of the community speak their own ethnic dialect, but the official language for community meetings and high-level decision making is Myanmar language. As less women speak Myanmar Language than men do, it makes it difficult for women to raise their voices and speak up in the community and in the public spaces. Many women also expressed their limited

*"In my lineage, we put men in a high place. I can be a village head and hold higher leadership roles, there are no barriers, but I will only hold village head if there are no men in the community" (Woman KII, 53 years old, widow, 5 children, President of village women's group and cultural association).*

*"Women's thoughts are wrong, they are emotional, and they are depressive and make mistakes. That is why they should not take the leadership role" (Male FGD, Male KII, PM).*

*I think we should take back those position from them [women]." (Male FGD, Kone Nyone village).*

education along with literacy skills as a barrier, while men noted women actually have higher education levels than they [men] do. (FGD Women, Kyone Nyone-2; FGD Women, Kyone Nyone-1, FGD women MP-1).

**Limited Freedom of Movement:** Many women reported their lack of freedom of movement as a barrier to participating more actively in the community. There were varied responses relating to the levels of restrictions on women's movements depending on whether they were married or singled; however, it was seen that generally, married women have more freedom of movement and opportunities to participate in public spaces. Unmarried women are often more restricted by family members due to "safety and security" concerns related to them [unmarried women] participating more actively in public (FGD Men PM, FGD women group 1 MP). However, some married women also noted that their movement is also controlled by their husband, where they need to gain approval from them before for leaving the house and/or participating in certain groups/activities.

*"My husband controlled me a lot. I could not participate in anything, anywhere in the community. He doesn't allow me to go outside. He said he worries about me, and it is unsafe for me. But he can go wherever he would and do whatever he would like to do. And now I am alone with 12 children as he has abandoned me. (Women FGD, Pang Mun village, 60 years old, 12 children, Kachin Ethnicity)*

**Age and disability barriers:** Women living with a disability who participated in FGDs noted they face more barriers, as do elderly women, than women without a disability who are younger (KII CSO Women, MP village, 23 years old).

Disabled women have very little opportunity to participate in the decision-making spaces at any level. During one KII, a woman noted that if a woman with a disability wanted to take on an active role in the community, she would be criticized and asked, "how will you do this as you are not an abled person, how will I manage you?" (KII, Kone Nyone village, 48 years old, Wa nationality, have 3 children, Christian).

**Burden of women's workload:** Another major barrier is the level of household responsibilities that women are responsible for, including childcare, care for the elderly, cooking, cleaning, and other household chores. This leaves little time available for women to take on other roles in the community. Many women interviewed reflected their own concerns that if they are more active in the community, they may not have time to complete their household chores and they are worried about their husband coming back to chores not yet completed. One of the male respondents from the FGD male expressed. However, some of the women shared that if they were to participate more, they may be able to obtain more rights.

*"Women can be leaders, but I will not ask my wife to be leader because I cannot help her with the household work" (Villager, FGD Male group, Kone Nyone).*

## Risks from supporting women's participation and leadership in Man Pyaing village, Kone Nyone village, Pang Mun village in Lashio Township

Gender based violence continues to be risk women and girls face and increasingly so as a result of the conflict, and the economic situation, such as loss of livelihoods, as well as lockdown restrictions due to COVID 19. Women raised concerns about their increased participation in spaces leading to

less time to complete other household responsibilities and the possibility of domestic violence as a result. The high rate of drug use in the township also leads to increased risk of GBV, including domestic violence, which women noted as a concern if there were to be more active in public spaces. Actions to mitigate these risks should be discussed with women's groups.

## Promising directions for Women Lead in Emergencies in Man Pyaing village, Kone Nyone village, Pang Mun village in Lashio Township

While there are many barriers to women's meaningful participation, there are a number of entry points for addressing these barriers:

- 1. Strengthen capacity of women who are already active in community spaces**
  - Identify and work with women who are already active in community groups to build on their experience and strengthen their confidence, communication, and negotiation skills, as well as build up their knowledge on their rights.
  - There were a few women referenced that are active as 10 Head of Households or are in other leadership roles. They could serve as an entry point to support other women to become more active.
  - Build up women's knowledge of their rights, and their skills, such as in Myanmar language.
- 2. Connect women and women's groups with other women's groups to build a network for greater solidarity and impact.**
  - There were many women's groups identified in the Lashio Township. While they may not have decision making power as a group on their own, perhaps working as a more connected network there can be greater reach and influence.
- 3. Engage male leaders and male community members on gender equitable norms**
  - Invite husbands of women to activities that discuss gender norms around freedom of movement and the unequitable share of workload held by women. By engaging with men from the beginning of any activities, there may be greater opportunity for women to participate and decreased risk of GBV.

## Gaps and areas for further research

This is a first draft of the RGA-P in three villages in Lashio Township. Data collection was limited as the three villages were quite distance from one another and with an assessment team of only 4 individuals (2 women, 2 men) there was not sufficient time to collect as much data as would have been preferred to increase the sample size for the data sets. The assessment team was also delayed due to multiple military and militia check points before being able to enter the community.

More information should also be collected on the following:

- Governance structures and the decision-making bodies at village, tract/ward, and township levels. Including how individuals come to hold those positions.
- Cultural committees' level of influence in the community and upward governance structures.
- Community perceptions and the level of influence of the various women's groups.
- Barriers faced by elderly women and women with disabilities.

## Conclusions

Women in Lashio Township are active in community groups and while they may not be able to influence key village decision making processes, these groups and the women active in them are a key entry point to strengthen and improve the perception of women as leaders.

Engaging with men as allies to support their wives to participate by taking on their share of household chores, to encourage them to give their wives freedom of movement and not to stigmatize or shame other men who support women leaders will be critical.

While the conflict in Myanmar shows no signs of abating, it will be important to monitor the changing governance structures in communities, formally and informally, as that may change in accordance with outcomes from fighting between the military and EAO. Women have taken on new roles in the community but the level of influence and authority to make decisions and hold influential leadership roles has not been seen, thus it is important to catalyze on this moment to support women to these spaces and to provide an enabling environment for them.

**Additional References**

1. Myanmar Humanitarian update No. 19, 28 June 2022.
2. Women participation in the subnational governance of Myanmar, Discussion paper No 3, Paul Minoletii, June 2014, page 44)
3. CARE's RGA, August 2020