



# *We women* foundation

Annual Report 2013

# Preface

Dear Reader,

This year has been a year full of changes within Burma, which have affected everyone working along the border with (unrecognized) refugees and migrants. Funding possibilities diminished and most of the resources were redirected into Burma. *We women* students, colleagues and friends told me that the changes were accompanied by feelings of both hope and despair. Hope, because of the belief, that real change would finally come and that Burma would become a free and democratic country after all. Despair because donors and outsiders jumped into Burma and started up projects without sufficient local consultation. These organizations began supporting changes that were not yet real changes, as the government was still holding and detaining political prisoners. Freedom of speech and press was still very limited and there were but few signs pointing towards “real” democratic reform. In the western media, although the discourse was mainly positive, the cause that so many had been fighting for over fifty years was almost forgotten, as if with the change of the regime, Burma all of a sudden had turned into a fairytale. This was stressful and frustrating which led to considerable pressure on the peace process that grassroots leaders from inside and outside Burma had been engaged in.

The fact that outsiders have so much influence on discourses and funding revenues in this process makes the need to assist more women from Burma to obtain leadership positions even more crucial. *We women* will keep fighting for women like Nang Mo, our first graduate of whom we are so proud, to be able to affect changes from within. Nang Mo, graduate of the Ma program in Educational Administration knows from her personal and professional experience that there is a high demand for education reform inside Burma. “*Without state infrastructure and resources,*” she says, “*the education systems are completely underdeveloped.*” Nang Mo has already achieved immense accomplishments as a student, teacher, trainer and education manager. It leaves no doubt that she will continue to have a huge impact on Burma’s education system. She is currently partnering with fellow *We women* student Nang Mawk to establish a scholarship program for migrant students from Burma. It seems that we are only just beginning to see what this promising woman can achieve for her community!

As 2013 ended, even with our funding challenges, we could keep all our students enrolled in the universities to complete their studies in the coming years, so that when they graduate they can follow in Nang Mo’s footsteps and become even greater agents of change and role models in Burma!

The fact that there were funding cuts locally on top of an economic crisis around the world, gravely affected the available funding sources for *We women*. We were not able to secure as many donations as in the previous years. This gave us less space to realise the growth that we had planned the year before. Fortunately, more people offered to volunteer and even staff members were willing to work more on a voluntary basis, therefore we could maintain all our projects and only had to cut back on a few activities.

By the end of the year many *We women* students, colleagues and friends felt it was safe enough to return to Burma and they decided to continue the struggle for a democratic Burma from within, to see if more could be achieved from this position. This shift made us decide that *We women* should also move into Burma and we therefore started planning and developing new projects based on the research done in the previous years and the actual situation in the country. This has mostly

been done voluntarily, for which I am very grateful.

The focus of the new projects will be on working inside Burma. Our upcoming female leaders will almost all be inside of Burma by the end of next year. Our aim is to start pilot projects inside Burma in 2014, so that in 2015 the majority of our projects will be within the country and a small part of our activities will take place along the border in Thailand. Besides these new projects, we will focus on phasing out our activities inside Thailand. During this phasing out process, we will ensure that the women who stay in Thailand will continue to be supported and we will of course keep strong ties and alliances with our partner organizations and the universities in Thailand.

*We women* will keep on moving forward and this is only possible because of our dedicated staff, volunteers, donors, friends and family who have supported us throughout a rough year full of changes. My heart goes out to all of you and to our students who keep on fighting for changes, not for themselves, but for the people for Burma to live in equality!

Let's keep on realizing social change together!

Ursula Cats  
*Executive director*

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# 1. Introduction

## **Changes in Burma thus changes for *We women***

Since 2010, major changes have been taking place in Myanmar/Burma. After the installation of the first civil government after more than five decades, Aung San Suu Kyi was released from her house arrest and was allowed to participate in the by-elections of 2011. Many gestures of goodwill from the new government followed and international trade embargoes were lifted by Western countries. The whole world has been watching how Myanmar and its people prepare to make the transition from a junta-led nation to a modern society. For the millions of refugees living in the countries around Myanmar, these changes came suddenly and were greeted with a lot of suspicion. Many refugees were confronted with the question whether or not they would want to move back into Myanmar if that opportunity ever presented itself. Up until this day, many of them still do not have a clear answer to this question.

A change that is a direct result of the changes in Myanmar - and has become more apparent over the past year - is the redirection of aid money from the surrounding countries directly into Myanmar. A lot of aid organisations are of the opinion that, with the positive changes implemented by the new government in Myanmar, it is better to start rebuilding the country rather than to invest in the well-being of the refugees around Myanmar. Many grassroots organisations that were founded in and by the refugee communities in Thailand are following this trend and an increasing number of organisations are deciding to move into Myanmar and conclude their activities for refugees. A common explanation for moving into Myanmar is that it has become virtually impossible to find funding for projects that cater to refugees. Something *We women* can, unfortunately, attest to.

## **The past year and *We women's* future**

Throughout 2013, it has become clear to us that we have to focus on developing projects inside Myanmar. It was never easy to find funding for our scholarship grants, but with all the funders focusing their attention on Myanmar, it has become even more problematic. Because of the lack of financial resources we have been confronted with over the past year, we decided not to award new students with first year scholarships and have focused our attention on keeping our current students in university. We were still able to support fifteen students attending university with grants and coaching. The number of students in our pre-university project decreased, as women who were preparing for university saw their organizations move into Myanmar and moved into the country with their organizations. Trainings, workshops and discussion groups were held for large groups of upcoming female leaders in the community. Our advocacy strategy focused on raising awareness on the situation of (unrecognized) refugees, migrants and women from Myanmar in collaboration with partner organisations, to show the urgency and need of educational leadership projects along the border and inside Myanmar.

We are excited to announce that despite the diminishing funding, we were still able to run our projects smoothly with the input of many volunteers and are looking forward to 2014 when many of our students are graduating.

The coming years will see *We women* wrapping up our Thailand projects and start new activities within Myanmar. Since 2012, we have been keeping track of the changes occurring in Myanmar and what they mean for the people living there. From next year onward, we will be compiling all the research data we have gathered and will start developing new projects to address the needs

that become apparent to us. Together with the alumni of our Thailand projects, we shall implement a set of diverse activities for the most vulnerable people of Myanmar. The aim of *We women*, which is to assist women to become inspirational leaders in their country and communities, will never change; just the setting in which we realise this aim.

## **2. The Organisation**

### **2.1 Vision and mission**

The *We women foundation* strives for equality for different groups of people in the world. *We women* helps women, refugees, ethnic minorities and disadvantaged groups with their problems. We give people the space to formulate their own needs, without forcing our thoughts and beliefs upon them. Academic research is the first step of this process, as it creates insight into local beliefs, customs and aspirations. *We women* is committed to personal growth, social inclusion, (mental) health, education and encouraging creative initiatives, with the ultimate goal: equality for all.

### **2.2 Working methods**

As described in our mission statement, academic research is the basis of the work of our organization. Not only during the start-up phase of projects, but during the later phases as well. Ongoing research into the connections between the programs and the needs of the target group as well as analysis of work completed, ensures that *We women* continuously evolves and creates programs that are relevant to the communities it supports. Besides conducting research into the needs of the target group, *We women* also constantly examines what the programs of other organizations in the field offer. By comparing this data to the needs of our target group, it becomes apparent whether there are any gaps to fill. This ensures that *We women* is active only in those places where support is most needed.

In order to create the perfect conditions for realising our work, *We women* also focuses on raising awareness of the issues that concern our organization. We might now be well acquainted with the needs of our target group ourselves, but this is obviously not the case for everyone. For the realisation of our programs, *We women* depends on the support of partner organizations, individual and corporate donors and volunteers. Awareness of the urgency of our work amongst these groups is fundamental to enable us to make proper requests for support.

### **2.3 Organizational structure**

All activities of our organisation are supervised by the board of the foundation. Although preparations were made to change the composition of our board in 2014, throughout the past year it remained the same as when the foundation was established in 2009. The board currently consists of:

- 1. Ms Ursula Cats (chairman)**
- 2. Ms Caroline Seagle (vice-chairman)**
- 3. Ms Nadia Moussaïd (secretary)**
- 4. Ms Kieja Janssen (treasurer)**

All of the organisation's activities are overseen by the executive director, Ms Ursula Cats, and managed by the general manager of the Thailand office, Ms Cindy Wilkinson. For our Burma-related activities the management of our organization is supported by an advisory board. This advisory board consists of four renowned women from Burma. As these women are active in a climate that is highly politically sensitive and wish to remain anonymous, their names are not published in this public document. Due to the importance of her other commitments, one of the

members of our advisory board was replaced in 2013.

The organisation's activities are realized by a team of employees and volunteers, supervised by the executive director and general manager. The number of salaried positions remained the same in 2013, but the structure of the organization changed slightly. The positions of the TOEFL-teacher, office assistant and program manager were unchanged. The executive director stopped working from the Thailand office and has not received a salary over 2013. The general manager was added to our staff and received a fulltime salary. The communications and fundraising positions were filled by a salaried staff member for only five months in a part-time capacity. After that these tasks were performed by volunteers.

The staff of the organization was supported by a number of volunteers throughout the year. Their level of involvement differs greatly; some have been active for several years on a continuous basis, while others take on tasks for just one day. The activities they perform are, among other things, tutoring students in academic English, organising benefit events and realising tasks in the field of communications and fundraising. Our volunteers are from various parts of the world, and mostly perform their tasks in the Netherlands and/or Chiang Mai. In 2013, the number of volunteers increased compared to 2012.

#### 2.4 Partner organizations

Since 2010, the *We women foundation* has been working together with two other organisations that provide migrants and refugees from Burma with opportunities for higher education. For reasons of security, one of these organisations does not wish to be named in this public document. The other organisation is called BEAM (*Bridging Educational Access to Migrants*). The cooperation with these organisations is aimed primarily at joining forces and expertise, with the goal of optimising the impact of our work. In 2013, this cooperation consisted mainly of exchanging expertise and jointly providing academic English lessons to our students.

In 2013, *We women* also became involved in the MEII (Migrant Education Integration Initiative) as a senior committee member. MEII is a consortium of various education organizations and individuals who are active for migrants from Burma. Together these organizations strive to accredit migrant education and to connect this with the educational system inside Myanmar, so that migrants can study in both countries without losing their credits.

#### Developments at the organisation level in 2013

	2011	2012	2013
Number of changes to the board	–	–	–
Number of changes to the advisory board	–	–	1
Number of salaried positions	3	6	6
Number of active volunteers	55	49	64
Number of partner organisations	3	3	3

## 3. Activities

### 3.1 Research

Where in 2012 we were conducting three active studies, in 2013, active research possibilities diminished. Due to a lack of resources, we were unable to maintain a strong focus on this. The research we collaborated on with BEAM, mapping educational opportunities for migrants in Chiang Mai, was concluded in 2012 and our gender and Burma research was limited to the monitoring of developments in those respective fields. We did however support researches of other organizations and students. Through collaboration with the Land of Smiles, We women assisted Erin Kamler in her PhD research on trafficking of women from Burma for the purposes of coerced prostitution. In partnership with universities in the Netherlands and Thailand we accommodated several students to conduct their thesis research with our guidance.

#### Research results 2013

	2011	2012	2013
Number of active studies	2	3	–
– Number of hours – research with BEAM	432	120	–
– Number of hours – gender research	106	80	40
– Number of hours – Burma research	–	340	40
– Number of hours – Land of Smiles focus groups	–	–	120

### 3.2 The *We women from Burma* project

The long-term objective of the *We women from Burma project* is to support women from marginalized areas in Burma in acquiring key positions within policy-making and influential organisations, so that they can empower other women and their community in their own way. These types of positions are currently often fulfilled by outsiders. Research has shown that women primarily identify the acquisition of academic qualifications as an opportunity to realise this. As women traditionally have a subservient role, they are not given sufficient opportunity to receive an education.

In order to realise our long-term objective, the *We women foundation* intends to make higher education accessible for the future female leaders of Burma. In addition, we assist them where possible in the process of professional development. To this end we have developed a number of programmes that jointly make up the *We women from Burma project*:

#### 3.2.1 Pre-university program

The pre-university program is aimed at supporting participants to gain qualifications required in order to be admitted to the university of their choice. The activities that make up this program include academic English class, guidance counselling and coaching, critical thinking and academic writing workshops and job placement services. In 2013, ten women participated in the pre-university program.

#### 3.2.2 Scholarship program

The scholarship program is aimed at rewarding our best participants with scholarships to a university program. Together with the advisory board we assess the candidates that submit an application. During the assessment process we consider the background and capacities of the women, but also their ambitions to take an active role in improving the lives of people from and in

Burma. The costs that are covered by the scholarship are tuition fees, travelling and visa costs and lodging expenses in the city that the university is located in. This allows our students to focus completely on their education. Despite the preparations of the pre-university program, our students need their full attention to be able to keep up with the pace and level of education in international universities. In 2013 a total of sixteen scholarships were granted.

### 3.2.3 *In-university program*

*We women* supports students that are in university by means of coaching, study training and access to online academic sources. We consciously opted for providing these activities on a small scale, so that we can support all our students personally and in a manner befitting their situation. Our support ranges from practical and academic support to emotional support during the personal development process. While in university, each student receives a total of six hours of counselling and support. The total of ninety six number of hours of support was provided in 2013.

### 3.2.4 *Internship program*

This program offers students the possibility to translate their theoretic knowledge into practical work experience. *We women* believes that an academic title alone is not enough to have the women immediately acquire jobs as the future leaders of Burma. It is therefore important that they can further develop their theoretical expertise and learn to translate it into practical experience. In addition, the program offers the opportunity to create a professional network that will help them find their way in their respective work fields. Due to limited resources, only students for whom an internship was part of their academic curriculum were placed in internships. Two students completed an internship with help from *We women* in 2013.

### 3.2.5 *Alumni program*

As more and more students are graduating from university, the alumni program is taking more shape by the day. As of now, no structural activities have been developed. Support offered to alumni is needs-based and organised accordingly. It is especially difficult to develop activities, because students move to different parts of Southeast Asia after graduating. Next year will see the development of online and offline activities to give more structure to the alumni program.

## Project results

	2011	2012	2013
<b>Pre-university program</b>			
Number of pre-university participants	24	20	10
Number of workshops and training sessions	6	6	22
Number of hours of coaching	120	60	60
Number of job placements	5	3	2
<b>Scholarship Grant program</b>			
Number of scholarships granted	8	14	16
<b>In-university program</b>			
Number of students in-university	5	14	16
Number of hours of in-university coaching	30	84	96
Number of graduates	–	1	1
<b>Internship program</b>			
Number of internship placements	–	1	2

### 3.3 Communication and fundraising

To inform the stakeholders involved in our work about the developments in our organization and its programs, *We women* utilizes several communications channels. The primary channels are our quarterly newsletter, our website and our social media outlets (Facebook and Twitter). Based on the statistics below, the numbers of recipients, visitors and followers have increased compared to 2012.

The number of newsletter subscribers unfortunately dropped by half compared to last year. This is a direct effect of necessary budget cuts. We only had a paid communications officer on staff for the first six months of the year, so we simply did not have the human resources to keep the development of the newsletter going. To compensate for this loss, we attracted volunteers to keep our other social media channels up to date. Fortunately, this was a successful approach to keep our followers informed and, as you can see, the number of followers is increasing rapidly.

#### Communication results

	2011	2012	2013
Number of unique visitors of the website	3789	5882	7384
Number of blogs published	29	31	35
Number of addresses on newsletter distribution list	372	562	684
Number of newsletters distributed	4	4	2
Number of followers on Facebook	335	765	1317
Number of followers on Twitter	129	265	516

As part of fundraising efforts, *We women* has organized several public events online as well as in countries like Thailand and the Netherlands.

To raise awareness on trafficking issues of women from Burma, Land of Smiles approached *We women* to assist and participate in a fictional, full-length musical. The musical focused on trafficking in Thailand as seen through the eyes of sex workers, grassroots activists, NGO employees and other members of the anti-trafficking movement. Inspired by field research of Erin Kamler, including over fifty interviews, Land of Smiles presented a critical look at how the story about trafficking is told, and showed that finding a solution to this problem is even more complicated than it seems. At the end of every musical, focus groups were arranged and facilitated by *We women* to support further research on trafficking.

In November, a group of our volunteers in the Netherlands organized a charity walk to raise money for a scholarship for Ying Long. At the same time, students, volunteers and staff of *We women* in Thailand organized a walk in Chiang Mai to raise awareness for our work. A total of sixty seven people joined the *Walk for Ying Long* and together they raised € 3630. *We women* would like to use this opportunity to thank all the volunteers and people that walked with. Because of the support received, Ying Long was able to obtain a scholarship for the next year in her university program and did not have to take a break from studying to raise funds for her tuition fees.

Like last year, we ended the year with an online campaign. Using our Facebook and Twitter following, we tried to raise as much awareness for our work as possible. At the same time we asked people to make a donation towards our good cause. This year we linked the online campaign to the upcoming release of the first documentary produced by *We women* titled

*Emerging women of Burma*. This documentary portrays seven women who are community leaders in Burma and gives a good idea of the type of woman our students aspire to become.

A trailer of the documentary was released during the online campaign to get people involved in spreading the word about our work. By the end of 2013, the *Emerging women from Burma* campaign had raised close to \$ 5000. Because the momentum of the campaign is still building, we decided to prolong the campaign until March when the documentary will be released. The exact amount of money raised in this campaign is therefore unknown to us at the moment. Keep an eye out for our next newsletter and future content on our social media channels to find out what the final result will be.

In addition to the benefit and networking events that *We women* attended in the past year, we have also taken many steps to attract new donors. We can categorize these donors into three groups: institutional, corporate and private donors.

Each group requires its own approach, so we spent considerable time and effort to create a good mix of donors from these three groups. We will provide a more in-depth analysis of the financial state of *We women* in the next chapter. We would however like to take this opportunity to thank one of corporate donors for their generous contribution here: Pure & Company ([www.pureandco.com](http://www.pureandco.com)).

Fundraising results

	2011	2012	2013
Number of benefit events	4	2	3
Number of online campaigns	1	1	1
Number of active monthly (private) donors	14	16	14
Number of one-off (private) donors	24	61	186
Number of active institutional donors	10	6	3
Number of active corporate donors	6	3	1

## 4. Financial Results

Due to the rapidly changing context of the field we work in, 2013 was a year in which it was extremely hard for us to raise sufficient funds. The total revenue of our fundraising efforts was 22,2% lower than the year before. Because of this we were operating on a very tight budget and, as you will see below, we had to cut back on a lot of our expenses. The total expenditure in 2013 was 21,4% lower compared to 2012. Below is a report of our revenue and expenditure.

### Revenue and expenditure in 2013 (in €)

	2011	2012	2013
<b>Revenue</b>			
Donations private	6.611,34	14.065,34	4.294,80
Donations corporate	40.846,70	34.683,11	4.926,40
Donations institutional	39.778,69	31.466,19	42.144,60
Benefit events	6.874,04	13.392,14	8.433,30
Loan	-	-	2.500,00
Other	531,94	673,63	71,00
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>94.642,71</b>	<b>94.280,41</b>	<b>62.370,10</b>
	2011	2012	2013

### Expenditure

Programme costs (71,9% of total expenditure)			
– Research	1.679,43	5.134,68	1.325,00
– Projects	32.388,84	76.343,54	54.944,84
– Advocacy	1.731,68	5.532,19	4.592,84
Communications & fund-raising (10,7% of total expenditure)			
– Outsourcing fund-raising	3.665,20	4.387,13	925,60
– Benefit events	891,96	2.877,39	7091,01*
– Promotion materials	787,55	1.233,36	988,19
Management & operational costs (13,9% of total expenditure)			
– Salaries	1.940,95	4.199,36	4524,50
– Office & utilities	1.808,444.154,47	3.602,72	
– Office supplies	1.120,78	2.160,30	758,41
– Travel costs	125,24	373,85	1.700,58
– Telephone costs	267,40	553,46	711,37
– Banking charges	278,39	309,47	422,33
– Postage	-	156,33	80,31
Other (3,5% of total expenditure)	408,66	294,67	2.979,29**
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>47.094,52</b>	<b>107.710,20</b>	<b>84.646,99</b>

\* Payable account 2012 included (Pansodan Gallery – art auction)

\*\* Legal costs for Thai registration included

We are happy to report that we managed to fully cover the expenses of 2013. Most of the continuity reserve from 2012 had to be utilized to do this. Unfortunately, we were unable to build a significant continuity reserve for 2014, but we did manage to raise some funds for scholarships to

be awarded in that year. After processing the financial records of 2013, the balance is as follows:

Balance 2013 (in €)

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**Balance 1-1-2013**

Cash & bank accounts	38.004,69	Accounts payable*	8.330,00
		Allocated reserves**	5.270,48
		Continuity reserve	24.404,21
	<b>38.004,69</b>		<b>38.004,69</b>

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**Balance 31-12-2013**

Cash & bank accounts	15.727,80	Accounts payable <sup>+</sup>	2.500,00
		Allocated reserves <sup>++</sup>	10.934,80
		Continuity reserve	2.293,00
	<b>15.727,80</b>		<b>15.727,80</b>

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\* Second instalment scholarship Nang Pao Hom & payment to Pansodan Art Gallery

\*\* Corporate donation reserved for scholarship Khaing May Oo

<sup>+</sup> Pay off loan

<sup>++</sup> Scholarships 2014

## 5. Acknowledgements

*We women* would like to thank the following people for their continued support:

- ✧ Thanks to all our students, without whose commitment and success our programs would be useless. Keep up the good work!
- ✧ A special thank you to all our partner organizations: BEAM and EPOP, for their continuous support over the past years. And all organizations that are involved in MEII.
- ✧ Members of our advisory board: thank you for your continued support to our work.
- ✧ Pure & Co: our largest corporate sponsor. We thank you very much for your generous support. Without you, our students wouldn't be able to go to university and fulfil their ambitions.
- ✧ We would also like to thank all our other corporate donors.
- ✧ AtDta: our biggest institutional donor. Your support has made a major impact on the lives of our students.
- ✧ Many thanks also to our other institutional donors: ASN Foundation for the scholarship support and Vamos Bien for cooperating in the production of the *Emerging women from Burma* documentary.

- ✦ All the volunteers that assisted us in any way: a massive thank you to you all. Wherever you are in the world and whatever you did for us.
- ✦ All donors who donated generously to our cause. There are too many of you to name you all, but be sure to know we value each and every one of you.

We hope we can count on your support again in 2014!