

WE WOMEN FOUNDATION

ANNUAL REPORT

2014



Preface

As our headquarters will move to Myanmar¹ in the first quarter of 2015, the past year has been one of reflection, analysis and working towards change. We launched a pilot project in Shan State, Myanmar and researched the context of our new working environment. With the results of these activities, the research and experience from the past years, we have build a solid foundation to start our office inside Myanmar in march 2015.

2014 has also been a year of fundraising, with events taking place all over the world to support We women Thailand's work. Thousands of people around the globe have shown interest in contributing towards change for women from marginalized communities in Myanmar. Over €11.000 was raised by the effort of many dedicated volunteers. I want to express my deepest gratitude to all our supporters who have contributed their time energy and resources to achieve these results. To name a few; Adriana de Fijter, Stef van Schijndel, Maria Diaz Ezquerro, Eva Flava, Hilary Dish, Alyssa Paylor and Andrea Perez, all of you have contributed a great deal towards women empowerment in Myanmar.

Another highlight of 2014 was that many articles were published about We women's work. One interview was with the Christian Science Monitor, a big newspaper in the US, where I was asked about the challenges of our work and they wrote the following: *"Cats and We women have been criticized for focusing on higher education, a type of assistance that can be a tough sell to potential donors because it takes several years to produce results. But Cats stands by We women's mission, saying graduate and postgraduate degrees are what women need if they are to gain positions of influence in Myanmar and thereby bring change."*(Ursula Cats puts the concept 'educate one, empower thousands' to work, 30 May 2014)

I am grateful that there are donors and supporters who, like me, keep on believing in higher education, as two of our amazing students graduated this past year and already are changing the lives of many others in their communities. One of them is Num Aye, who has been appointed to become *We women Myanmar's* Country Director. With her leading our new headquarters organization, we have reached our target that women from Myanmar should lead the changes in their country. We women is and always will be an organization supporting grassroots initiatives backed by the women themselves.

The women of Myanmar are the ones that I keep on feeling grateful towards the most, as they are my inspiration to work towards change and setting goals that might seem far away now, but will reach their full potential in the future. Strong, passionate and hardworking changemakers is what you are!

¹ You might wonder why we have stopped using the name Burma and replaced it with Myanmar. As we will establish our headquarters inside Myanmar, safety and contextual matters have to be taken into account. Using the name Burma will draw too much unwanted attention, as there are still activists imprisoned for outspoken opinions. Organisations and individuals working inside the country also refer to Myanmar on a daily basis.

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1. The organization

Mission statement

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 questions and 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.

We women was established in 2010 in the Netherlands. Until now, the organization has been primarily active in Thailand and as of the beginning of this year *We women* is also registered as a foundation there. After having conducted research into the needs of our target group in Myanmar over the past years, we have implemented our first project pilot in Taunggyi, Shan State in 2014. All activities in all countries are aimed at promoting gender equality and establishing women leadership.

Working method

All organizational activities contribute to the realisation of well-built projects that address the needs of our target groups. As described in our mission statement, academic research is the basis of our work. Not only during the startup phase of projects, but also thereafter. Ongoing research into the impact of our projects in relation to the needs of our target group makes that *We women* is a critical organization that actively reflects on her own work.

Besides research into the needs of the target group, *We women* also constantly looks at what projects other organizations in the field offer. By comparing this data to the needs of our target group, it becomes visible if there are any gaps to fill. In this way it is ensured that *We women* is active in only those places where it is most needed.

To create the perfect conditions for our work, *We women* also focuses on raising awareness on issues that concern our work. We, ourselves might by now be well acquainted with the needs of our target group, but this is obviously need the case for everyone. For the execution of our projects, *We women* depends on the support of partner organizations, donors and volunteers. Awareness about the urgency of our work amongst these actors is fundamental to be able to make proper requests for support.

Organizational structure

All activities of our organisation are supervised by the board of the foundation. The composition of the board has remained the same since the foundation was established in 2009. The board consists of:

- Ms Ursula Cats (chairman)
- Ms Caroline Seagle (vice-chairman)
- Ms Nadia Moussaïd (secretary)
- Ms Kieja Janssen (treasurer)

All of the organisation's activities are managed by the executive director: Ms Ursula Cats. In her work, she is advised by an advisory board. This advisory board consists of three 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. In 2014, two women who were part of the advisory board gave up their positions and one new member was added, so the number of members declined from four to three.

The organisation's activities are realized by a team of employees and volunteers, supervised by the executive director. Over 2014 there were only three paid positions in the organization. Both the general manager and the office assistant of the Thailand office received a full time salary throughout the year. For the first six months of 2014, there was also a full time position for a program coordinator in Thailand. The executive director, financial manager and fundraising & communications personnel all worked on a voluntary basis and in different capacities.

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 already 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 from all walks of life. We would like to take this opportunity to bring across our gratitude to all who have helped us in any way throughout 2014. Without you *We women* would not have been able to carry out all that we have done.

Developments

At the end of 2013 it was decided that *We women* would be moving its projects to Myanmar at the end of 2014. This whole year, the focus has been on ending the project activities in Chiang Mai and preparing for the move into Myanmar. For this reason, the number of participants has been declining throughout the year, and with it the staff in Chiang Mai has shrunk significantly. The Chiang Mai office will not close completely, so some *We women* presence will remain in Thailand. Who and how we will remain present in Thailand is something that will be figured out in 2015.

The move into Myanmar is not only greatly affecting the organization of *We women Thailand*, but now also that of *We women Myanmar*. The last two months of 2014 saw us employing the first country director of the *We women Myanmar*. Num Aye comes from Shan State and is a *We women* alumni. We are proud to have achieved our goal to have a strong ethnic woman from Myanmar in this position. Num Aye is supported in her work in Myanmar through coaching, training and mentoring by experts in our *We women* team.

2. The results

This chapter will give you an overview of the results we booked. Most of our activities took place in Thailand, but we are pleased to announce that we were also active inside Myanmar. To give you a more illustrated view on our results, we have highlighted some of our achievements in 2014.

2.1 Thailand

Education program

Since its founding, *We women* has been focused on providing access to higher education to women refugees from Myanmar who are living in Northern Thailand. Within this program three main activities can be distinguished;

- University preparation & English language class

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.

- Scholarship grants

The scholarship program is aimed at rewarding our best participants with scholarships to a university program. 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.

- In-university support

We women supports students that are in university by means of coaching, study training and access to online academic sources. We consciously opt to provide 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.

Throughout 2014, the Thailand office has focussed the majority of its energy towards the education program. 3 students received partial scholarships for academic education and 5 students took part in our in-university support project. As we already know the activities in the Thailand office will be brought back to a minimum over, no new participants were admitted to the pre-university program. However, 4 existing students were allowed to continue their university preparation and tutors have worked with aspiring students throughout the year.

The crown on our work within this program is when students successfully conclude their education and graduate from university. In 2014, we saw 3 students succeed and we would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to one of our successful alumni. On the next page, you can read about Min Win Thida an outstanding student, who was offered a job in a prestigious think-tank before she even graduated.

Student profile: Introducing Min Win Thida

Min Win Thida grew up in Mon state amongst much turmoil. She experienced violence, totalitarianism, disappearances, and insecurity in myriad ways. Still, she steadfastly pursued her academic ambitions. This year she graduated from Chulalongkorn University with a Masters in Health Economics and Health Care Management.

As an undergraduate in Burma, Thida studied and worked as a nurse. Working with the women of her community and within Burma's health care system convinced Thida of the necessity of wider reforms. Her experiences at home only made the need for a better health care system more pressing. *"My mother has a chronic bronchial asthma and she needs to take lifelong treatment. The majority of our family income goes to health care for my mother, so my father is unable to save what money he makes from his farm. Income from our farm is not enough for the family to survive so we also rely on the remittances from my brother who works in Malaysia. This is just one example of the many ways families in similar situations cope. I have seen many cases from my neighbors who have had to sell their assets and take out loans in order to cope with health care expenditure. We need health care reform that will allow families to access care without sacrificing their livelihoods."*

While working as a nurse in Mon State and then Yangon, Thida involved herself with a Mon youth group. This allowed her to pursue both of her passions, contributing to the social issues impacting the people of Mon State while also providing important medical services and fulfilling the expectation of her nursing degree. However, when Thida had the opportunity to participate in a community development program in Thailand she jumped at the chance.

Once in Thailand, Thida took part in *We women's* pre-university and in-university programs. Although she struggled with leaving her country and nursing job behind, she was aware of the great opportunity to impart change on a large scale. *"During this time of change and reform, it is important to try and ensure that healthcare issues are included in any policies which deal with poverty reduction. By studying Health and Economics, and gaining a greater understanding of how these two sectors work together in other countries, I will be able to help affect Burmese policy and help improve the future of Burmese healthcare, ensuring that disadvantaged, poor and marginalized people are provided for."*

Min Win Thida hopes that not only her career achievements but also her personal choices have a positive impact on fellow women from Burma. *"As the youngest child, I ought to be at home, taking care of our farm and family. But ... I want to show our women that they can do something for our community. Most women give up their education or career once they are married or have children, but I want to be a role model for our Mon women, to show they can do something for the community and the people of Burma, to change their situation for the better."*

With her current role at the Center for Economic and Social Development in Yangon, Thida is certainly leading by example. Surrounded by some of the best minds from Burma, Thida is completely in her element. Her work, doing prestigious policy advising on health and economic issues, allows her to have a sincere influence on government policies and apply her experiences and education for the good of the people of Burma.

Advocacy

Raising awareness about the situation of the women we work with is part of the core of *We women's* work. In order for us to make meaningful requests for support, it is important that potential donors and the general public have a sense of the urgency of our work. Throughout each year we organize a number of events to spread our message, often including fundraising elements. As you can tell from the list below, the majority of the advocacy endeavours are coordinated from the Thailand office.

Amongst our advocacy endeavours in 2014 are:

- The release of our 2013 produced documentary 'Emerging Women of Burma',
- An interview with director Ursula Cats published in the major American newspaper Christian Science Monitor,
- The 'Art from Burma' exhibition in Chiang Mai, Thailand,
- Selling donated goods at the Queen's Day flea market in Utrecht, the Netherlands,
- Benefit Night at Ramby Cultural Creativity Centre in Chiang Mai, Thailand,
- Our annual online campaign and real life events in support of this.

Highlight: Emerging Women of Burma documentary

A lot of the advocacy activities we undertook in 2014 were designed around the release of the Emerging Women of Burma documentary. By portraying a number of successful and inspirational women leaders from Myanmar, we aimed to show the world why our work is important and what results we are striving for. Over the past decades, Myanmar received mostly negative attention on the world stage. We deliberately adopted a positive tone to try and convince people to support our work in Myanmar, but also wanted to present the women of Myanmar with positive role models.

The release of the documentary generated much attention for *We women*. Especially inside Myanmar many people were interested to find out more and the documentary was mentioned in many media outlets. But we also managed to generate international exposure for the foundation. For example in Thailand, where nearly 100 people visited a screening of the documentary at the Burma Studies Center at Chiang Mai University. Amongst the visitors were students, people from Myanmar, human rights activists and many aid workers from various NGOs and CBOs. Jai Jai, the filmmaker, kindly offered some background information about the documentary while one of our scholarship students, Moan Kaein, discussed her personal story and relationship with *We women*.

More screenings were organized around the world in support of our annual online campaign in December. We asked former volunteers and friends of *We women* to host a screening in their community. Not only to raise money for our campaign, but also to give them an opportunity to explain to their friends how and why they are involved with *We women*. A total

of eight screenings were organized in the United States, The Netherlands, Thailand, New Zealand and Myanmar. Including volunteers and friends in a personal way proved to be effective campaigning as the 2014 online campaign was the most successful one until now.

2.2 Myanmar

We are proud to announce that 2014 is the year in which *We women* implemented its first project in Myanmar. From March to July we ran the pilot of the *Gender Dialogues project* in the ethnic area Shan State in North-East Myanmar. The *Gender Dialogues project* addresses deep-rooted gender inequalities across Myanmar and Thailand that have prevented women from being considered as capable leaders of actors.

The *Gender Dialogues project* aims to promote a stronger understanding for both men and women on the changing of role divisions in a society when more women are in leadership positions. The project assists in providing an in-depth understanding of gender (in)equality within the local community, so that women can have equal access to leadership positions. To create equal chances for women to become leaders in their communities, we assist women and men to understand each other better. Deeper understanding can help to overcome gender issues and provide greater insight and solutions. Therefore, the open dialogues revolve around the following two main questions: What does it mean for men if more women become leaders? What does it mean for women to become leaders? In considering these questions, men and women can become more aware of their individual responsibilities in supporting gender equality within their community and country.

The primary goal of the gender project is for participants to realize that theory and practice should not differ and that both sexes have different abilities and strengths. Hosting dialogues among women and men from community based organizations (CBOs) who already have some knowledge about gender issues, will allow for in-depth discussions, leading to greater understanding and gender awareness in the community. Open dialogue will give space to participants to share their thoughts in coming to grips with gender issues.

The results of the pilot are as follows:

1. Twelve participants gained new insights into and better understanding of gender issues and gender equality within their community,
2. Twelve participants designed two gender equality awareness campaign aiming to empower women from the community to elevate themselves to positions of leadership,
3. Twelve participants have developed sufficient expertise and feel the necessity to function as advocates for women's rights within their work and community.

We would like to highlight the uniqueness of the *Gender Dialogues project* in terms of the inclusion of both men and women. There are many CBOs working effectively in Myanmar on women's issues. Most of these organizations focus exclusively on women's rights and empowerment, taking a women's centered approach instead of being guided by gender mainstreaming. *We women* strives for gender equality and ensures that both men and women are involved in this struggle.

3. The finances

3.1 Revenues & expenditures

Revenue (in €)

Donations monthly private donors	2.100,00	(11,0%)
Donations fundraising campaigns & events	11.703,52	(61,4%)
Donations foundations	4.700,00	(24,7%)
Directed donations (to specific benefactors)	550,00	(2,9%)
Total revenue	19.053,52	(100%)

Expenditure (in €)

Program costs	20.534,48	(85,1%)
Fundraising resources	707,85	(2,9%)
Outsourced fundraising	886,98	(3,7%)
Travel & accommodation	773,96	(3,2%)
Telephone charges	863,91	(3,6%)
Banking charges	352,15	(1,5%)
Total expenditure	24.119,33	(100%)

3.2 Balance

Balance 1-1-2014

Triodos Bank	9.641,26	Allocated reserves	5.310,43 (scholarships)
		Continuity reserve	4.330,83
	9.641,26		9.641,26

Balance 31-12-2014

Triodos Bank	4.602,45	Accounts payable	-
		Allocated reserves	1.500,00
		Continuity reserve	3.102,45
	4.602,45		4.602,45

Acknowledgements

We women would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people:

- All the students who continue to give their best in university - your hard work inspires us every day,
- Lush UK for making the pilot of the *Gender Dialogues project* possible,
- Shannon Passero for her financial support to our annual online campaign,
- Volunteer Nidhi for making the online campaign a big success,
- Vamos Bien for the financial support for Emerging Women of Burma,
- Jai Jai for his involvement in the Emerging Women of Burma production,
- All the volunteers who organized screenings around the world,
- All our dedicated volunteers who contribute in many ways toward change