

# **WE WOMEN FOUNDATION**

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2015**



## Preface

I would like start this report to mention Chilli, our beloved sister, friend and colleague, who died in a traffic accident in March of this year. Chilli had been working with We women for over two years. In those years she showed great passion and dedication for her work and the goals of We women's programs. She leaves behind a husband and two children. We have set up a scholarship for her children, so that they can finish their schools and study in university, which was a big wish of Chilli.

Furthermore this year in our preface I would like to give you some more insight into a core vision of the organization and how that forms and affects the work we do.

At We women we always use the word assisting instead of helping. Helping might imply that people cannot do it themselves whereas assisting show that people have skills and strengths to begin with, but can use some assistance in their process of growth. No one should have to grow on their own. In situations of inequality, we believe that we need to share our skills and resources to assist people who would like to grow. The way that we do this is by believing in resilience and agency. We know that by defining the people we work with through their skills and opportunities, we can have equal dialogue. This gives strength and encouragement to belief in oneself, to move forward and to grow.

Before we start new projects or revise existing projects, we will always go into the field to do research among our target group and ask them how they experience the work we do and how they think We women can contribute more to assist them with their growth.

When we have gathered all our data and have analyzed it, we will start up or revise a project step by step, asking along the way feedback from our students and participants and from experts. This is how We women grows and also forms alliances with other local organizations. As we also believe strongly in working together with local groups in the community.

As a result of the way we work, we have a very large local network and are respected in the field by them. Dr Cynthia Maung, whom is a legend and role model for all women in Myanmar, says the following about the work we do: *"Education, safety and dignity for women should be a priority and women should be part of this process. People should support We women foundation because through focusing on gender equity we can help to make a more balanced society in Myanmar."* We are very honoured and proud to be supported by Dr Cynthia Maung.

Another great result of our work, is that our alumni Pao Hom is now after graduating participating in the actual peace dialogue that is held between the political parties, and ethnic armed groups. She has also pressed for women participation and gender equality as an agenda point and succeeded. She is now working with UN Women and Euro Burma Office to organise round the table discussions with women who can participate in the process.

We are honoured and proud to know Pao Hom and to be able to work together with her.

We are honoured and proud to work with all the amazing women of We women, it has been a pleasure this year again to work with you all. And also to work with our amazing colleagues in the field. Let's keep on growing together!

**Ursula Cats, Founder & Director**

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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.

### 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. Throughout the year, we have been working hard to establish a new board. Even though the official changes have not been made yet, three new board members have been identified and began working together to oversee the organization. The new board members and their roles are:

- Ms Maartje Eigeman (chairman)
- Ms Maartje Meens (treasurer)
- Ms Ciska Jansen (secretary)

All of the organisation's activities are managed by the executive director: Ms Ursula Cats. In her work, she is advised by a think tank of women from the field of (international) development work. This think tank consists of several renowned women who are very familiar with the developments in Myanmar and the Southeast Asian region. Some of them live in Myanmar and are of ethnic descent, where others are foreigners who live or have lived in the region for longer periods of time. Some of them are active at the grassroots level, where others are or have been

working with INGO's. Each bring their own specific expertise and skills set and we are extremely lucky to be able to ask them for assistance and their insights when we need them.

The organisation's activities are realized by a team of employees and volunteers, supervised by the executive director. Over 2015, there was only one paid positions in the organization; the country director of our Myanmar office. The executive director, financial manager and fundraising & communications personnel all worked on a voluntary basis. Their level of involvement differs greatly; some have been active for several years already on a continuous basis, while others take on tasks for one project. Our volunteers are from various parts of the world and from all walks of life.

### **Developments**

*We women* was established in 2010 in the Netherlands. Over the first five years, the organization has been primarily active in Thailand and since early 2014, the organization has an official registration in there. Later that year, the organization first became active in Myanmar with the implementation of the pilot of the *Gender Dialogues project* in Taunggyi, Shan State.

As we have been planning for the past years, *We women* moved its projects into Myanmar this year. At the beginning of 2015, we established a permanent office in Yangon, Myanmar. With the opening of this office, the activities of the Thailand have dwindled down, as most of the women we work with have moved back inside Myanmar. The Thai organization will remain active in a low key state. Our office space in Thailand is now used by other organizations to run trainings, as well as a place to host volunteers.

### **Chilli scholarship fund**

Due to the loss our great office manager Chilli, who was a dear friend and colleague, we decided to set up a scholarship fund for her two children. The scholarship funds will keep on being managed from Thailand.

## 2. The results

This chapter will give you an overview of the results we booked. Most of our activities took place in Myanmar, but we will also share some of the activities that took place in the Netherlands. To give you a more illustrated view on our results, we have highlighted some of our achievements in 2015.

### *Establishing our Yangon office*

The opening of the Yangon office took up most of the first six months of 2015. As the country director of Myanmar is the only paid staff member of the organization, most of the work landed on her shoulders. Not only finding an office building, furnishing it and getting connected by phone and internet took a lot of time; the setting up of the Yangon office felt a bit like founding a new organization. Yes, some of our partners do have a presence in Yangon too, but most of our professional network was left behind in Thailand. At an early stage, it became clear to us that positioning ourselves in Yangon and getting connected with our professional surroundings is going to take a lot of time and energy.

### **Introducing Num Aye: the first country director of *We women Myanmar***

We are very proud to be calling Num Aye 'the first country director of *We women Myanmar*'. Especially, since she's been part of the organization before it was even established. The founder of the *We women foundation*, ms Ursula Cats, based the idea of the organization on the results of the research she executed for her Master thesis. This research took place in 2009 and Num Aye was one of the participants who Ursula interviewed.

When the *We women from Burma project* was established in Chiang Mai in 2010, Num Aye was one of the first women to enter our university preparation program.

### *Women: Agents of Change*

Where micro-financing institutions (MFIs) mainly focus on poverty alleviation of the extremely poor, *We women* aims to take this approach one step further. We believe women with true business instinct have the ability to provide in more than just their own economic necessities; they are the most suitable candidates to be at the helm of social enterprises. For these women to reach their full potential, they should be given the opportunity to grow their existing micro-businesses into small and medium enterprises (SMEs). SMEs are often considered to be the backbone of modern economies. They play a crucial role in development as they are seedbeds of innovation and are dynamic by nature. As is common in the developing world, SMEs are underrepresented in Myanmar and basic structures for their support are not present.

Aiming to fill this gap, We women, in partnership with EEPPOC (Australia), has set up a program to provide aspiring social entrepreneurs with the key knowledge and capital they need to grow their businesses. Targeting women who have the ambition to become community leaders, these women are trained to utilise a business approach to achieve social impact. In this manner, We women believes to build capacity for inclusive and sustainable economic growth and social development.

A training program has been set up with the experience and knowledge of EEPPOC Australia. The program has been set up in such a way that the women get also knowledge and skills to provide the training to other women – a so called ‘Train-the-trainer’ set up. The first training (of about 10 women) is expected to take place in February 2016 in Yangon.

### *Women Leadership Network*

Currently in Myanmar, women in professional and leadership roles have few options for networking. This limits the ability of women to grow their roles within their sector and community. A professional women’s network would enable women from all sectors to share skills and experiences, thereby developing their own roles while inspiring and facilitating more women to enter into leadership roles.

The women’s leadership network is primarily aimed at women in emerging and established leadership roles, such as We women alumni, businesswomen, academics, NGO & Community leaders, activists, politicians and experts from other fields.

Transportation is very challenging in Myanmar and travelling takes up a lot of time. Together with the purpose of building a multi ethnic and multi regional network, network meetings have been organized in both Yangon and Taunggyi, Shan State.

The meetings take place on a monthly basis and have had an attendance rate of about 15 women per meeting.

### *Scholarship Project*

#### 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. 2 students received partial scholarships for academic education and 2 students of our former pre university project in Thailand obtained scholarship grants from other donors.

#### 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. This year 4 students took part in our in-university support project.

### *Alumni Project*

This project supports alumni of We women whenever they need assistance. Coaching will be given to any alumni who has a need for this. Other assistance varies per alumni and can be helping with setting up projects, giving feedback on proposals or ideas, assisting with research projects, editing, networking and other demands.

## **Meet some of our amazing graduates**

### **Hom Bee**



After having worked as a social worker Hom Bee continued to pursue her desire for a better education by applying for- and being granted a scholarship at We women foundation to study at Webster University majoring in International Relations. For Hom Bee and many like her, it is important to study abroad. The poor education system in Myanmar, which Hom Bee refers to as “spoon-fed education”, is based on memorising facts, instead of developing critical thinking. Her master’s degree helped her take charge of her own learning process and have helped her understand the situation in her own country better. Having just graduated, Hom Bee is figuring out her next step. Her dream is to become a documentary maker or researcher. She wants to use her research skills to become an advocate and give a voice to Burmese war victims who are often neglected in the political process and by the international community.

### **Noan Harn**



Unsatisfied with the quality of her university education in Myanmar and ever eager to learn, Noan Harn decided to pursue opportunities in Thailand. She applied for We Women's pre-University program, which prepared her to undertake an MBA. Her dream is to create jobs for the people in her community as part of development processes. Noan Harn started her own social business and is improving the capacity of women to run a profitable, ethical and inclusive business, which inspires many ethnic women

### **Pao Hom**



After earning a Bachelor's degree in Myanmar Pao Hom moved to Thailand, feeling that she had no choice but to leave her country in order to obtain a more concrete education. She came into contact with We Women foundation and set off to pursue her degree in Educational Management. She firmly believes that. "Through a more creative curriculum, we can encourage children to think for themselves, share their opinions, and learn to follow their aspirations." Since then Pao Hom has trained up to 100 teachers in critical thinking skills, that has improved the education of over 700 students from Myanmar. Right now, Pao Hom is working for Chiang Mai's Pyidaungsu Institute for Peace and Dialogue. Here she is contributing to change by working across stakeholders to help build a more sustainable and equitable peace process for Myanmar.

### 3. The finances

#### 3.1 Revenues & expenditures

##### Revenue (in €)

Donations monthly private donors	2.795,00
Donations fundraising campaigns & events	8.714,51
Donations foundations	19.279,37
Volunteers Renting Rooms	5.500,00
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>36.288,88</b>

##### Expenditure (in €)

Program costs	23.557,07
Outsourced fundraising	1.608,90
Travel & accommodation	500,00
Telephone charges	493,30
Banking charges	319,59
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>26.478,86</b>

#### 3.2 Balance

##### Balance 1-1-2015

Triodos Bank	4.602,45	Allocated reserves	1.500,00
		Continuity reserve	3.102,45
	<b>4.602,45</b>		<b>4.602,45</b>

##### Balance 31-12-2015

Triodos Bank	14.412,46	Accounts payable	-
		Allocated reserves	4.000,00 (WAC Project*)
			6.000,00 (Scholarships)
		Continuity reserve	4.412,46
	<b>14.412,46</b>		<b>14.412,46</b>

*\*Women Agents of Change*

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to take this opportunity to bring across our gratitude to all who have helped us in any way throughout 2015. Without you, *We women* would not have been able to carry out all that we have done.

Thanks to our financial supporters: the (monthly) donors, the corporate sponsors and foundations.

Thank you to EEPPOC Australia and in particular Joanne Cotton, who has provided crucial support, knowledge and experience to set up the training for the Women agents of change project.

And of course we want to thank

- All the students who continue to give their best in university - your hard work inspires us every day,
- Shannon Passero for her financial support to our annual online campaign,
- Sense Aandachttraining Groningen for their generous support since 2011,
- Volunteer Annelies and Sarah for making the online campaign a big success,
- All the volunteers who organized dinners and events around the world,
- All our dedicated volunteers who contribute in many ways toward change