

REPLY FROM THE UNION OF MYANMAR

TO THE

QUESTIONNAIRE ON IMPLEMENTATION

OF THE

BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Overview of trends in achieving gender equality and women's advancement

In the Union of Myanmar, women enjoy equality with men as an inherent right. A Myanmar delegation, which had attended the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, had the opportunity to apprise the world community that women are fully enjoying their rights in the country. The Myanmar Delegation joined other delegations in adopting the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women.

In fulfillment of the commitments made in Beijing, the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA) was established on 3 July 1996, under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement which is designated as the National focal point for Women's Affairs. The committee is chaired by the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and members of the committee are the Deputy Ministers from related ministries such as the Ministries of Health, Education, Labour, and Foreign Affairs.

The three Presidents of the notable women-related non-governmental organizations of the country, viz. the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA); the Myanmar Women's Sports Federation (MWSF); and the Myanmar Women's Entrepreneur Association (MWEA) are also members of the committee. The Myanmar National Working Committee for Women's Affairs (MNWCWA) was subsequently formed on 7 October 1996. It was followed by the formation of State, Division, District and Township (grass-root) levels working committees for women's affairs.

As a follow-up action to the Beijing Conference, Myanmar became a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against

Women in July 1997. The initial report of the country to the Convention was submitted in March 1999.

The MNCWA adopted the Myanmar National Action Plan for the Advancement of Women in December 1997. It holds regular meetings every three months and reviews reports submitted by the MNWCWA on its activities and developments. It has also adopted the short-term plan of action for the Working Committee and has laid down policy guidelines for the advancement of women, especially for those living in the far-flung remote border areas.

In the Statement of the Secretary (1) of the State Peace and Development Council, Lt.General Khin Nyunt, on 27 July 1997 at the MNCWA meeting, the following Policy Guidelines were laid down:

- (a) To effectively promote the health, education and socio-economic status of the entire mass of Myanmar women down to the grass-roots level;
- (b) To educate and organize the Myanmar women to uphold the tradition, culture and to safeguard one's own lineage and religion with a view to combat the infiltration and influences of foreign culture which could lead to social problems;
- (c) To strive in unison for the emergence of a peaceful, modern and developed nation by all the women forces from government departments, non-governmental organizations, social organizations and members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association, at various levels, engaged in Women's affairs;
- (d) To implement the resolutions of the World Women's Conferences into action in accord with the State policy and political, economic and social objectives;

- (e) To make endeavours by the Women's sector to achieve the political, education and social objectives of the State by formulating relevant aims and objectives based on the momentum of success gained.

The MNCWA has identified six critical areas of concern for the advancement of Myanmar women namely: Education, Health, Violence Against Women, Economy, Girl Child and Culture. Sub-committees for these six areas have been set up accordingly. Out of the six areas of concern identified, five areas are taken from the twelve critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. Culture is an additional area of concern of the MNCWA. These six areas are considered basic and the most relevant for the advancement of Myanmar women. The activities on these areas are to be carried out with the cooperation and collaboration of the Ministries concerned as these areas are already dealt within the programmes and functions of the Ministries. With the participation of the MNCWA, the Ministries will also be able to implement the plans and programmes more effectively and genderwise. Although only six areas have been identified for focus, the remaining areas are also given due attention. Most of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action are interrelated and interdependent. Integrated programmes on the enhancement of the role of women in the Health, Education and Economic sectors can benefit the areas of Women and Poverty, Human Rights of Women and Women in Power and Decision-making. Regarding the area of Women and the media, the number of female journalists, camera crews, engineers, announcers, vocalists, mediators, reporters are increasing in recent years. The MNCWA representatives sit on the censor board of Myanmar Motion Pictures and Video. The media is urged not to give a distorted image of women to the public but to enhance the awareness of their role and contributions to the family, the community and the country.

In the Women and the Environment area, the environmental awareness among the Myanmar women has increased significantly over the past decade and Myanmar women pay much more attention to the environmental issues and have become more convinced of the importance of protecting the environment. Accordingly, the Myanmar women are now actively involved in environmental activities such as tree planting, soil conservation, water harvesting, agro-forestry, clean-up activities of the Myanmar National Commission for Environmental Affairs. Furthermore, the Myanmar National Commission for Environmental Affairs, the principal organization for environmental affairs, has women officials in the higher hierarchy of the organization. The MNCWA has plans to participate in National Afforestation Programme by planting a variety of trees in public places in cities and towns during the rainy month of July, a month designated as Arbour month in Myanmar. The area of Women and Armed Conflict is not relevant to present-day Myanmar, since the country has been in peace for decades. However, there are a large number of female nursing cadets, police officers, and prison wardens in Myanmar.

The MNCWA has organized seminars, and workshops in the country and sent delegations to various regional meetings on the advancement of women. As a result, Governmental officials, Representatives of the States and Divisions Working Committees and NGOs have an opportunity to share the experiences and to examine obstacles and constraints in activities carried out at different levels for the advancement of Myanmar women.

Some of the activities of the MNCWA are as follows: -

- (a) Publications in Myanmar language of excerpts from the existing laws, rules and manuals on the protection of the rights of Myanmar women and Comparison between the rights of

women enshrined in CEDAW and those in the existing Myanmar laws on Women's rights, April 1998.

- (b) National Seminar on Women's Development, 6-7 May 1998
- (c) The First Myanmar Women's Day Celebration, 3 July 1988
- (d) The First Myanmar Women's Conference, 6 to 9 December 1998
- (e) Regional Consultation on Violence against Women and the role of the Health Sector, 12 to 15 January 1999
- (f) Third International Women's Day Celebration, 8 March 1999
- (g) The submission of the initial country report to the CEDAW, March 1999

These occasions were attended and addressed by the State high authorities and widely publicised through media such as newspapers, television and radio. Interviews with the leaders of the women's organizations about the occasions were also broadcast to enhance the public awareness of the role of women in the national development endeavours.

The global financial crisis has not yet affected Myanmar directly, but the country has suffered from the contagion effect and the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow has dropped in the country. To recover from the effect, some remedial measures have been taken as necessary and restructuring and recovery strategies have been laid down based on national requirements. The country is self-sufficient in basic food requirements. So the effect is relatively low in the entire people including women and girls.

PART TWO

Financial and Institutional measures

As mentioned in the report earlier, there is no discrimination whatsoever against women in the country, the national budget does not need to allocate separate headings for women's-specific policies and programmes. The policies and programmes for the advancement of women have been laid down as an integral part of the national development programmes. Myanmar's national programmes for the enhancement of the role of women are in fact mostly in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. For these reasons Myanmar considers it unnecessary to create new programmes to follow up the Platform for Action. It is necessary only to revise the policies from time to time to keep abreast with the fast changing developments in women's affairs at both regional and international levels.

The Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA) has its own budget (fund) apart from the allotment in the national budget through the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. The fund is totally independent and spent only on the activities on the advancement of women. The fund depends on voluntary contributions of the individual, companies, and organizations within the countries.

The well-known and established non-governmental organization in the field of advancement of women, the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA), received assistance within and outside the country. Because of the bilateral donations, the fund has been increased significantly in the recent years.

As follow-up to the World Summit for Children which was held in New York in September 1990, Myanmar acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in July 1991. Subsequently it became a state party to the Convention on 15 August 1991. The Government promulgated the Child Law as a State Law on 14 July 1993 to implement the rights of the child recognized in the Convention. The Myanmar National Committee on the Rights of the Child (MNCRC) was formed in September 1993 to implement the provisions of the Child Law effectively and successfully.

PART THREE

Implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action

A. Innovative policies, programmes, projects and good practices.

The Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs has implemented five critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and one additional area of Culture. The activities carried out in implementation of these 6 areas of concern are as follows:

Education and training of Women

In Myanmar, education policy and procedures for admission, selection, and examination are same for male and female. Every educational institution is providing same curricula, teaching methods, quality of teaching staff, and teaching-learning materials for all students without discrimination due to sex. Almost all forms of education at all levels are co-education.

Myanmar is launching Education For All (EFA) project to achieve Universalization of Primary Education. The Ministry of Education is providing special funding for free textbooks, clothing and stationery for needy students. The Government is trying to ensure universal access to Primary Education by enlisting the support of parents and community throughout the country. There are no school fees for primary education at all. Every school has started using continuous assessment and progressive system at primary level since 1998-99.

The Basic Literacy Programme has been carried out in three Divisions: Ayeyarwaddy, Mandalay and Sagaing with the collaboration of the Government Departments and Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Associations.

The national and international NGOs offer stipends and scholarships to the needy students to increase enrollment and retention rates.

The functional literacy programmes for 15+ age group is implemented in all the States and Divisions.

In order to eradicate illiteracy among women, local learning centres are established in Buthidaung and MaungTaw Townships in Rakhine State with the collaboration of the UNHCR. The target is to reduce the female illiteracy rate of 26.49% at present to 11% by the year 2000.

The vocational training programmes such as sewing and embroidery classes, livestock breeding training for the women and girls are held with the collaboration of UNDP and UNESCO as part of the Human Development Initiative (HDI) programme.

Teaching materials are also provided for skill-based literacy programme through Non-formal Education. Skill-based literacy programmes, continuing education programmes and other vocational training for dropouts from secondary and tertiary levels are providing same opportunity for men and women. Project on skills-based literacy programme for women and girls - project has been implemented by Myanmar Education Research Bureau / UNDP in many townships and is still in progress.

To ensure access to quality education and training at all appropriate levels for adult women with little or no education, Myanmar Educational Research Bureau., Myanmar National Commission for UNESCO and Asia /Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU) from Japan are in the process of negotiations to establish Literacy Resource Centres for Girls and Women (LRC) in 1999.

Almost all the teaching staff at primary and secondary levels is female . At tertiary level there are female demonstrators, lecturers and professors.

Women and Health

Myanmar women have an equal access to health care services with men. Health care is provided to all citizens in Myanmar without any discrimination. There is no traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, such as female genital mutilation, which is alien to the Myanmar culture and totally unknown in the country.

The reproductive health, one component of National Health Plan in Myanmar, is promoted by the introduction of birth spacing programme since early 1990's. The programme has been extended to 117 out of 324 townships by the end of 1998. The activities are being conducted by the various departments of the Ministry of Health in collaboration with local and international NGOs, other related Ministries and private sector as well.

Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association has conducted training on life skills for women in 96 townships since 1997 to strengthen preventive programmes that promote women's health. Both urban and rural women have been given information on AIDS/ STD prevention, prevention of other infectious diseases and basic necessities for healthy living. These women pass on the information to the others. The programmes will be expanded to remaining townships in the following years.

To reduce maternal mortality rate to less than one per thousand live births by the year 2001, health services particularly primary health care are being strengthened. Under-one-infant care and under-five-child care are being strengthened in order to reduce mortality rates of infants and children by one half of the 1990 level by the year 2001.

The Department of Health has done training courses on syndromic management of STDs for general practitioners, township medical officers, doctors from the maternal and child health centres and other basic health staff in 96

townships. The training courses will be extended to the remaining townships by the year 2001.

Information, education and community materials (IEC) regarding the prevention of HIV/ AIDS have been produced in different ethnic languages. The community including youth and students are given AIDS education by the township health departments.

A pilot study on Essential Obstetric Care in a township in the Ayeyarwaddy Division had been carried out by the Sub-committee of health of the MNWCWA . The findings of the study will be submitted to decision-making authorities to be used as a model in other townships.

Violence against women

In Myanmar, there exist very few cases regarding violence against women. This is mainly due to Myanmar traditions, culture and practices, which continue to ensure for women a position in line with contemporary concepts of equality. Although it is not a major issue, it is one of the priority areas of concern of the MNCWA, as it can effect women's health and hinder the advancement of women.

The Sub-committee on Violence against women has taken integrated measures to prevent and reduce violence against women, to provide help and to rehabilitate the victims of violence. The Sub-committee has laid down strategies such as Raising awareness on the violence directed against women; Wide-spread dissemination of information on where to seek help for victims of violence; Upgrading the capacity for providing health care for the victims including establishment of drop-in centres, counselling centres and shelter homes.

Research on violence against women has been carried out in some States and Divisions in order to explore the magnitude of the problem, to identify the possible causes of violence, and to determine the consequences of it. The result

has been found that the magnitude of both physical and mental violence are quite low as expected.

A small-scale study was conducted in four townships on marital violence by using quantitative and qualitative methods. The data of two townships has been analyzed, and it is found that the percentage of mental violence is higher than physical violence. The main causes for violence are financial problems, alcohol, and disharmony with in-laws and adultery.

Two counselling centres each in Yangon and Mandalay Divisions have been established to help the victims of violence. It is in the process of establishing at least one counselling centre each in States and Divisions.

The training workshops on Systematic data collection and Counselling Methodology were held in Yangon.

The Ministry for Progress of Border Areas and National Races has established eight vocational training centres for girls and women in the town adjacent to neighbouring countries to prevent trafficking in women and girls.

The Department of Social Welfare conducts domestic science training courses in States and Divisions for young women and girls to be able to carry out income-generation activities.

The MNCWA has established a task force on trafficking of women, with the participation of departments concerned.

The MNCWA, a local NGO is also combating trafficking of women by means of educating, alleviating poverty and generating income. Credit and loan schemes have been implemented in 50 townships. Vocational training programmes have been conducted so far in 25 townships and it will be increased to 50 townships by the year 2000.

In Myanmar there exist Laws which counter sexual exploitation, trafficking and sale of children across borders. One of the Laws namely The Suppression of Prostitution Act, 1949 was amended in April 1998 according to prevailing circumstances.

Women and the Economy

Myanmar has replaced its centrally planned economy with a more liberalized economic policy and has instituted structural reform measures to pave the way for market oriented economic system. The Government has also liberalized domestic and external trade, promoted the role of the private sector, and opened the country up to foreign investment. As such number of companies and joint ventures have increased significantly.

As Myanmar women have an equal opportunity with men in the economic sector, there have been many female owners of companies, managers, traders, shareholders, brokers, shop-owners and petty traders etc. Moreover, the number of women entering the area of business, commerce, agricultural and industrial sectors has also increased.

According to 1998 Labour Force Survey there are 14.28 million males and 8.82 million females in the Labour Force. All male and female workers in the same professions have equal pay for equal work. In the Agriculture sector, the first priority area in the country's economy, the role of the rural women's participation is increasingly recognized by the State. Sixty-four percent of Myanmar Labour Force is actively engaged in agriculture sector in which women's labour is mostly engaged in the areas of land preparation, seeding, transplanting, intercultivation, fertilizer application, harvesting, threshing and cleaning. To boost the agricultural output and to raise the income of the rural populace the Government has taken steps to exploit the untapped land resources. The Government has undertaken projects to tame vacant, fallow, virgin and wet lands and made arrangements for the national entrepreneurs to grow crops in five Divisions of the country.

The Ministry for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs was established in 1992 as the Government has designated

the border area development as top priority. The Government has been carrying out the regional development works such as building of roads, bridges, hospitals, clinics, basic educational schools, vocational training schools especially for girls and women and setting up communication links. As a result, social standards and living conditions of the national races have improved considerably.

Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association (MWEA), a local NGO, is playing an active role in raising the socio-economic life of Myanmar women and in encouraging environment friendly and culturally sensitive businesses. One of the ongoing successful activities of MWEA is the credit and loan schemes for women casual sellers in the market. The Association also held seminars, workshops on business management, product development, financing, production and quality control and the legal aspects of business. MWEA held a seminar on Micro Credit Systems and Women's Banking with the cooperation of Hanns Seidel Foundation in February 1999 where experts on Women's Banking from Malaysia and the Philippines shared their experiences with local experts and persons interested in this field.

The Girl-Child

In Myanmar society, the children are looked upon as precious treasures regardless of sex. Both boys and girls are equally loved in the family. Some families prefer daughters as they usually take more responsibility of the parents than the sons do. The children are protected in all possible ways by parents, relatives and the community. As in other societies, Myanmar recognizes that the girl-child needs special care, as their age has to experience physical, psychological and mental changes.

To promote the girl-child's participation in social, economic and political life, youth organizations such as the Union Solidarity and Development

Association, and the Myanmar Red Cross Society are providing various training courses for youth including the girl-child at the township level.

The Sub-committee on girl-child is conducting an action research on its target group in the rural areas in Yangon Division to protect and safeguard the rights of the girl-child.

The advocacy meetings relating to negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls are being held in all fourteen States and Divisions.

The Sub-committee on girl-child has distributed five thousand copies of Manual for Women's Development throughout the country.

The National Committee on the Rights of the Child is the most responsible organization in protecting and safeguarding the rights of the child, including the girl-child.

Women and culture

Women and culture is the additional area of concern of the MNCWA, which the government has placed as one of the top priority areas in the advancement of women. The sub-committee on Women and culture has been carrying out a number of activities to implement the social objectives of the country, viz., to uplift dynamism of patriotic spirit, national prestige and integrity, to preserve the cultural heritage; to safeguard the Myanmar culture and traditions.

The essay and poetry competition, extempore talks and debates on the topics such as the role of women in preserving the cultural heritage; Myanmar Women's Day etc are being held annually at basic and higher education levels.

Myanmar traditional music and dance, composing and singing competitions are organized at the State and Division level. Fashion shows are also held to revive and encourage the wearing of traditional Myanmar attire.

Classes on religion for girls and young women are being held during the summer vacations. The Myanmar tradition of venerating elders is included in textbooks and public actions as well as in other media.

Publication for women with a focus on Myanmar culture and traditions are being published. Special radio talks and television spots for women-related matter will be aired on a regular basis by the year 2000.

B. Obstacles encountered

In implementing policies and measures in the above-mentioned six critical areas of concern, only a few obstacles have been encountered. But as there exist no discrimination against women, these obstacles are common in nature as in other policy implementations. There is a lack of human resources in the women-related organizations due to the fact that most of the personnel who are involved in the committees have their primary duties. They can only perform the activities of the committees as their secondary duties. There are also lack of technical, financial and material resources for the initiation of innovative programmes and projects on the advancement of Myanmar women. Furthermore, it is necessary to motivate and educate the entire women-folk to enable them to participate in the activities for their own benefit.

There are no traditional practices harmful to the health of women and girls. Though there are sensitive issues and social stigma regarding women's health as a consequence of violence against women, there are no social taboos that can have harmful impact on women and girls.

C. Commitments to further action and initiatives

The Myanmar National Working Committee for Women's Affairs (MNWCWA) has adopted the Myanmar National Action Plan for the Advancement of Women in August 1997.

Some of the activities to further action are as follows: -

- (a) Universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80 percent of primary school-age children through both formal and non-formal education by the year 2000.
- (b) Reduce the female illiteracy rate of 26.49 percent to 11 percent by the year 2000.
- (c) Ensure access to quality education and training at all appropriate levels for adult women with little or no education.
- (d) Health services, particularly primary health care, are being strengthened. To reduce maternal mortality to less than one per thousand live births by the year 2001.
- (e) Under-one infant care and under-five childcare are being strengthened by one-half of the 1990 level, by the year 2001.
- (f) Develop training programmes on the causes, consequences of violence against women for police, prosecutors, judicial personnel and prison officials from 45 townships of Yangon Division by the year 2000.
- (g) Enforce existing legislation against the perpetrators of violence against women.
- (h) Enhance rural women's income-generating potential extending access to skills and resources for non-traditional income-generating activities at the national and local levels.

- (i) Advocacy meetings on negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls are being conducted in all States and Divisions by the year 2000.
- (j) National Committees on the Rights of the Child will be formed in all the townships by the year 2000.
- (k) Ensure universal access to and completion of primary education by all children by the year 2000.
- (l) Myanmar traditional music and dance, composing and singing competitions have been held annually.
- (m) Traditional festivals are held annually.
- (n) Religious classes for girls are being held during vacations.