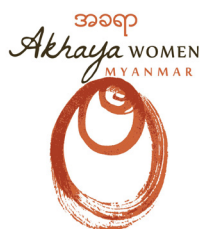


PRACTICE BRIEF

MYANMAR WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS MENTORING PILOT PROGRAM

**INCREASING THE INFLUENCE OF MYANMAR'S
WOMEN POLITICAL LEADERS THROUGH MENTORING**

MARCH 2018



OVERVIEW

Sustained mentoring is an effective strategy for increasing the influence of elected women leaders and the likelihood of their re-election.

In 2017, Akhaya Women and IWDA successfully piloted Myanmar's first structured mentoring program for women parliamentarians. **The pilot is part of IWDA's regional Women's Action for Voice and Empowerment (WAVE) program**, funded by the Dutch Government. The pilot is co-funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

The pilot involved matching six Myanmar women MPs ('mentees'), with a commitment to gender equality, with six Australian MPs and former MPs (the 'mentors'), who shared that commitment.

Addressing one of the key critiques of women's parliamentary leadership programs, this model is a strong example of sustained, tailored support to targeted women leaders throughout the electoral cycle.

Early results suggest that when framed with a gender equality agenda, women's political mentoring programs can be an effective strategy for newly elected women MPs, particularly:

- Strengthening political skills
- Enhancing cross-party networks of women parliamentarians
- Strengthening links between women MPs and women's rights movements
- Deepening political ties across countries

This pilot demonstrates the important role women's rights organisations can play in supporting progressive women parliamentarians.

IWDA'S APPROACH TO INCREASING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

- Introducing temporary special measures in electoral frameworks and/or party policies
- Challenging harmful perceptions about women to ensure women are perceived as equally legitimate and effective political leaders as men
- Increasing the number of women interested in being a candidate
- Supporting women candidates throughout the electoral cycle
- Supporting elected women to improve their power and influence to advance women's rights



Exchange to Australia, 2017
Photo credit: Kira Sharkie

CONTEXT

While the number of women MPs at the national level doubled in the 2015 Myanmar election, they still only make up 10.2% of all MPs.

These elected women are exceptional individuals who have overcome enormous barriers to reach Parliament, and continue to face discrimination as elected parliamentarians. Gendered norms and stereotypes cast doubt on women's leadership capabilities. Men are seen as being endowed with natural leadership skills, while female MPs - women parliamentarians who are as well as, or better educated, than their male peers¹ - have their capabilities more closely scrutinised.

Women MPs face wide-ranging challenges, including:²

- lack of informal networks and relationships in the Parliament
- feelings of being ignored and not receiving the same level of respect as male MPs
- living apart from their families while residing in Naypyidaw for the majority of the year, with no access to childcare facilities
- very limited access to information and research materials
- no budget for administrative or research support
- difficulties maintaining connections to their constituencies while in Naypyidaw

WHY MENTORING OF ELECTED WOMEN?

For those women who do achieve elected office, it is essential they are supported to stay there and to do well in a male dominated environment.

A growing evidence base demonstrates the importance of sustained support throughout the electoral cycle. If the objective is to support women's election and re-election, it is ineffective to invest at a single point before an election with campaign skills workshops. Strategic support must be provided before, during, and after elections.³

In addition to skills, elected women require:

- Linkages to networks, including linkages with men and potential funders⁴
- Support in raising their profiles
- Greater opportunities to demonstrate to their constituents their capacity to deliver effective outcomes for the country and community⁵

To increase progressive outcomes for women, it is critical that this support be targeted towards women with a commitment to gender equality and with genuine prospects of success.⁶

¹ Asia Foundation and Phan Tee Ein, Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians, April 2017.

² Asia Foundation and Phan Tee Ein, Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians, April 2017; IDEA and the Parliamentary Centre, Report on the Needs Assessment Surveys of the Members of the Hluttaw of Myanmar, 2016; UNDP, Survey of Myanmar Members of Parliament: Reflections from the First Hluttaw, 2016.

³ Julien Barbara, J and Baker, K, Improving the Electoral Chances of Pacific Women through an Evidence-Based Approach: A synthesis report, Centre for Democratic Institutions and the State Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, ANU, December 2016.

⁴ ODI, Women's voice and leadership in decision-making: Assessing the evidence, April 2015, p 14.

⁵ Julien Barbara, J and Baker, K, Improving the Electoral Chances of Pacific Women through an Evidence-Based Approach: A synthesis report, Centre for Democratic Institutions and the State Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, ANU, December 2016.

⁶ Dr Nicole Hayley and Dr Kerry Zubrinich, Women's political and administrative leadership in the Pacific, State Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, ANU, 2016.

THE MODEL

This mentoring model is based on the EMILY's List Australia mentoring scheme, which has matched new women candidates with experienced women campaigners as mentors over the past 21 years.

Over 250 women have been elected to parliaments around Australia with support from the EMILY's List program. The model has also been applied to support new local government women councillors and to women campaigning to become local government councillors.

“Effective mentoring involves an exchange of skills and experience firmly based on mutual respect.” – Senator Claire Moore, mentor, 2017/2018



Ann Sudmalis MP and Daw Chris Htun MP,
Photo credit: Jen Clark



Daw Nan Htwe Htun MP and Former Senator Penny
Wright, Photo credit: Shwe Wutt Hmon

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Mutual:** Supporting mentoring partnerships that involve mutual learning and respect requires being sensitive to the power dynamics in the relationship. It is important to emphasise that both mentee and mentor bring different skills and experience to the partnership.
- **Shared commitment to gender equality:** Recruiting mentees and mentors with a commitment to gender equality is critical to increase the positive outcomes for women beyond the program and more systemically.

“When I first suggested a 30% quota for women in Parliament, the men laughed at me. They said, ‘if women enter politics, who will cook for us?’. I see quotas in Australia and I know to keep fighting” – Daw Khin Saw Wai, mentee, 2017

- **Non-partisan:** Ensuring broad representation across a range of political parties improves cross-party parliamentary networking.
- **Face-to-face, self-matching:** The matching of mentees and mentors is undertaken face-to-face. Supporting the mentees to identify their preferred mentor increases the likelihood of a successful ‘match’. If a mentoring relationship is not going well, it is important to ‘rematch’ quickly.
- **Formal:** Signing a mentoring agreement that identifies goals and ‘ground rules’ for their partnership sets a clear and solid foundation.
- **Confidential:** Ensuring confidentiality is crucial. A sense of trust is critical in a positive mentoring relationship.

- **Ongoing communication:** Communicating regularly (at least once a month) is critical. Ongoing conversations take place through phone calls, email, and social media (Facebook in particular).
- **Translated:** Facilitating communication through skilled and experienced translation support is essential to ensure effective communication and relationship building. Translation is provided for email communication.
- **Supported:** Providing external support to the partnership is critical to the health of the mentoring relationship. Regular follow-ups are undertaken by Akhaya and IWDA support staff with both the Myanmar MPs and the Australian MPs to monitor and support the mentoring relationships and help solve any challenges.
- **Grounded:** One travel exchange to Myanmar for the Australian MPs and one travel exchange to Australia for the Myanmar MPs helps support the mentoring relationship and significantly increases understanding of each other's political context.
- **Connected to the women's rights movement:** Embedding a women's political mentoring program within a broader women's rights agenda is essential. Partnering with a local women's rights organisation and contracting an in-country Myanmar Women and Politics Advisor has been crucial to the pilot's success.
- **Extended:** Following the structured one-year mentoring partnership, the mentor and mentee can choose to informally continue the mentoring relationship.



Senator Claire Moore and Daw Khin Swe Lwin MP,
Photo credit: Shwe Wutt Hmon



Judith Graley MP and Lway Nan Moe MP,
Photo credit: Jen Clark

INITIAL RESULTS

After just one round, the program is now sought after by Myanmar's women MPs. Following the successful 2017 pilot involving six women MPs, 27 applications were received for participation in the second round (44% of women MPs not already involved).

Initial results include:

Strengthened political leadership skills

Mentees report that the practical advice provided by their mentors has enabled them to strengthen their political leadership skills, particularly in public speaking and continuous campaigning.

"My colleague said 'You are speaking more confidently in Parliament ... what's changed?'" - Lway Nan Moe, mentee, 2017

Enhanced cross-party networks

The mentees are now operating as an informal, cross-party parliamentary women's caucus. With ongoing armed conflict in Myanmar, women MPs from different ethnic groups working collaboratively is a significant positive development.

Linking MPs to Myanmar's women's movement

The MPs are now actively connected to Myanmar's national women's rights movement. For the first time, MPs held International Women's Day events in their constituencies in 2018.

Akhaya Women is drawing on the MPs' support to promote national policy reform on gender-based violence.

Strengthened Myanmar and Australian political connections

The Australian mentors have gained a greater appreciation for the complex development challenges facing Myanmar, the value of investing in women's leadership programming in the region, and the positive role of aid.

For example, one mentor spoke passionately of the needs of Karen refugees in an Australian parliamentary debate on citizenship. The video of her presentation was shared widely on social media in Myanmar.

Promoting the concept of mentoring in Myanmar

As mentoring is a relatively new concept in Myanmar, this program has contributed to a greater understanding of mentoring and its benefits. As a result of their experience as mentees, all Myanmar MP participants in the 2017 pilot are now committed to mentoring women in their political parties.

Building the evidence base for political mentoring

As the majority of literature on mentoring relates to the corporate sector, this program is contributing to the global evidence base on political mentoring.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

A formal evaluation will be conducted in April 2018, with findings to be published shortly thereafter.

MEDIA STORIES

<https://iwda.org.au/when-judith-met-nan-moe-the-mentor-program-confronting-myanmars-patriarchal-parliament/>

<https://iwda.org.au/6-learnings-from-the-new-generation-of-myanmars-women-leaders-2/>



Meeting with the Hon Julie Bishop MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017,
Photo credit: Jennifer Nagy

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MARCH 2018



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
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