

RIGHTS FOR ALL

Stories of courage and
local action in Myanmar



DCA-NCA

Developed with funding from the European Union and DanChurchAid through their Rights for All: Empowering Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society organizations to promote and protect the human rights of the most vulnerable groups in Myanmar

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FOREWORD

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the inherent dignity of all people, and that this is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

This story book is just a small glimpse of the work and aspirations of people in Myanmar. It tells us stories of courage, determination and personal sacrifice. It also tells us that if people are encouraged and equipped with a little bit of knowledge and connected with other people of good intentions, then social change can happen. It also tells us that social change and human dignity are not just brought about by organised community members – but also by mothers, youngsters and people of all shapes and colours. With support from the “Rights for All” project, we wanted to show people that they have the power to change things themselves,

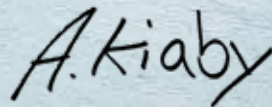
and that by taking collaborative action we can create a world where we can sleep in security and wake in happiness. I have had the opportunity to travel around the country to meet the many human rights defenders, change agents and local authorities who day in and day out work for the betterment of people. They all emphasized that a defining moment was when they got a chance to discuss the inherent dignity of all people, got a chance to share ideas with other people and got an opportunity to take action in their own communities.

The three consortium partners are incredibly honoured to have walked alongside the many human rights defenders and change agents on their paths towards “Rights for All”.

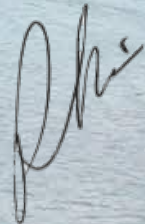
On behalf of Consortium



U Aung Myo Min
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INTRODUCTION

DanChurchAid-Norwegian Church Aid (DCA-NCA) together with local partners, Equality Myanmar (EQMM) and Local Resource Centre (LRC), are implementing the project, “Rights for All: Empowering Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society Organisations to promote and protect the human rights of the most vulnerable groups in Myanmar”.

The “Rights for All” project works with an extensive network of Human Rights Defenders (HRD), civil society groups and government officials in six states and regions in Myanmar (Kachin State, Northern Shan State, Mandalay Region, Kayin State, Mon State and Tanintharyi Region). The project has been implemented from January 2017 to December 2019 and has been co-funded by the European Union (EU). The goal of the project is to empower HRDs and civil society organisations (CSOs) to promote and protect the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in Myanmar. “Rights for All” has been doing this through:

Building the capacity and improving the coordination of HRDs, CSOs and duty bearers through trainings on human rights, legal awareness, leadership and advocacy, network and dialogue meetings, organisational capacity support and a small grants mechanism that offers CSOs the opportunity to address core human rights issues in their communities.

Protecting HRDs through an HRD protection fund, which provides HRDs with resources to facilitate their work and self-protection. This includes financial and legal support in situations where they are threatened or unjustly prosecuted for their human rights work.

Engagement with government authorities through several initiatives by HRDs, CSOs and CSO networks in advocacy at regional, national and international levels such as the EU-Myanmar Civil Society Forum and International Human Rights Day events, as well as through CSOs input to the Universal Period Review (UPR) process.

This photobook shares stories of courage and local action through the “Rights for All” project in six states and regions in Myanmar.







THE ROLE OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

Than Than Oo, 25, is a working mother from Bhamo, Kachin State. She became a human rights defender for the Rights for all project with Equality Myanmar, based in Myitkyina. Than Than Oo first became interested in human rights issues in her community when working as a field facilitator for a civil society organization, Alin Bhamo in 2017. Alin Bamaw is an implementing partner of Equality Myanmar for the promotion of human rights.

With Alin Bhamo, Ma Than Than Oo organized activities engaging with communities in remote areas, focusing on dialogue about civil rights and basic human rights education. She said the experience

A village elder reads a brochure of Rights for All project at one of community sharing session.

Above: Than Than Oo facilitates a community sharing session on human rights knowledge with a poster displaying the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.



enabled her to increase her understanding of how human rights relate to local communities. She noticed that a lot of people who experienced rights violations did not speak up, due to lack of knowledge that their rights were violated or where to report violations. Social stigma and mismanagement of cases that were reported, particularly cases of gender-based violence, also discouraged people from reporting violations. Than Than Oo said that at first, she faced resistance from village leaders and elders to

human rights training, which some saw as outsider interference in local affairs. When the Rights for All Project launched in March 2018, Ma Than Than Oo attended a training of trainers on basic human rights in Yangon, following which she organized multiplier trainings in villages in Bhamo Township. Than Than Oo also helped villagers apply for land tenure certificates, and land use applications known as Form 7, under the farm land law established in 2012.

Than Than Oo attends Regional Human Rights Defender meeting in Myitkyinar.



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My confidence on the knowledge of Human Rights had significantly increased after attending TOT training from Rights for all project

Than Than Oo.



Above: Thu Zar meets with Win Thein Oo, Dawei Lawyers’ Group member, to discuss how to respond to a domestic violence case.

THE CHANGE AGENT

Thu Zar, a mother of 3 children from Dawei became an active change agent in 2017 with “Rights for All” implemented by Local Resource Center(LRC) in Dawei. In November, 2017, when LRC, provided a 6- day basic human rights training in Dawei, Thu Zar was one of 30 participants.

This was not Thu Zar’s first time to participate in community development activities. In 2007, when the civil society organization Future Light came to Dawei to implement a project on child rights, she facilitated village meetings and mobilized community members to attend trainings. Since then, she has served as a regular community facilitator for different organizations’ projects.

Below: Thu Zar conducts an awareness session with women in a village in Dawei, on domestic violence in connection with human rights. e in connection with Human Rights.





Above: Thu Zar meets with a community member to explain how to report a case.

Next page: Thu Zar provides awareness to village women about domestic violence

The basic human rights training organized by the LRC enabled her to see her community through a different lens. Learning about various human rights articles, she realized that many of the conditions in her neighborhood did not meet basic human rights standards, and she became even more committed to supporting her community.

In 2018, Thu Zar was selected to attend a training of trainers on human rights for 36 days in Yangon, following which she was responsible for organizing eight trainings in her community and helping community members to report cases of human rights violations, child abuse and domestic violence. The human rights training strengthened Thu Zar's knowledge, confidence and capacity to take a leadership role in supporting her community to

understand human rights concepts and address human rights violations. Additionally, she said that as a result of the training, her view towards her community changed, could control her emotions more than before. Moreover, she also knows how to cooperate with colleagues.

Since attending the human rights training, Thu Zar supported eleven people to report cases of human rights violations in her village. One example in which Ma Thu Zar applied her knowledge from the training came in 2018 when she supported a woman from her community to access legal





services through the Dawei Lawyer's Group. In another instance, Ma Thu Zar received a report from a community member whose children were abused by a caretaker. Ma Thu Zar provided psychosocial support and helped the woman arrange to report the case to village authorities.

In addition to referring cases, Thu Zar also conducted awareness-raising activities in her community. As a result of these activities, communities are more aware of human rights concepts and how to report to local authorities when their rights are violated. 189 cases of human rights violations were collected and reported by HRDs/CAs, including child abuse, gender-based violence, land disputes, and article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law. Among these, some cases were referred to government institutions including the Department of Social Welfare, General Administration Department, police and legal system. A few cases were reported to the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission. Thu Zar said she aims one day to participate in decision making role in government so that she can help support young female leaders in her community, and raise community awareness on domestic violence and human rights issues.

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Many human rights violation cases are unreported in my community because of lack of knowledge, awareness on what services are available and social stigma. For these reasons, many fail to take action following rights violations.

Thu Zar

Below: Thu Zar talks with village women about some domestic violence cases in the village.



SUPPORTING VILLAGERS TO APPLY FOR LAND TENURE FORMS



Above: Win Ko Ko explains to his neighbours about how to apply for land tenure documentation certification with Human Rights.

Win Ko Ko, 48, is a farmer from Myet Chee Nu village in Naung Cho township, Northern Shan State. He owns about 2 acres of land, on which he grows dragonfruit, corn, and sugarcane with his family.

Win Ko Ko was a village administrator from 2011 to 2015, under the previous government led by president U Thein Sein. In his village and neighboring villages, he sometimes supports villagers to obtain a land certificate known as Form 7 which has been required by

the government to show land tenure under the farm land Law since 2012. The form also enables villagers to claim compensation in cases of land confiscation, sell their land, or borrow money from the bank using their land as collateral.

Win Ko Ko served as a Change Agent under the Local Resource Center's Rights for All project, for which he attended a 45-day training of trainers in Yangon on basic human rights, types of violations and where they can be



reported. He said the training helped him understand local land issues more clearly in relation to human rights.

According to Win Ko Ko, most people in his village do not have land tenure certificates, due to limited knowledge about the process and its necessity. Consequently, when large companies arrived, many villagers lost land

disputes, unable to prove tenure by legal means.

“The rights of people in my community are violated due to their poor knowledge and lack of information, and I feel responsible to change this” - U Win Ko Ko.

Since returning from the Rights for All training, U Win Ko Ko has been sharing information in



his community about the importance of applying for Form 7. He said that after speaking at a village meeting, villagers started visiting his home to ask him for support to get Form 7.

Above: Win Ko Ko explains to villagers about land tenure laws and policies he form 7 could be applied.

As Win Ko Ko previously worked in government administration, he said he is more familiar with the administrative procedures, and has coordinated with the Department of Land and Statistics to help villagers to apply for Form 7 as a group.

“

The rights of people in my community are violated due to their poor knowledge and lack of information, and I feel responsible to change this.

Win Ko Ko

Next page: Win Ko Ko in his dragonfruit garden in the morning.

Below: Win Ko Ko reads newspaper in his home.









GAINING CONFIDENCE TO REPORT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Inn Sein May is a civil society organization seeking to promote rural development and enhance women's rights in Naung Cho township, Shan State, which has been supported by the Local Resource Center for one year. In March & April, 2018, the LRC provided a 45-day human rights training of trainers for Inn Sein May's founder and director, Nyo Nyo San, following which she organized roll-out trainings for ten villages in Naung Cho township.

Inn Sein May also identified and provided human rights training for 84 change agents, also known as human rights defenders, in Naung Cho township,

which included how to identify human rights violations and where and how to refer them for needed services. Following the trainings, the Inn Sein May team meets with the change agents every two months to listen to their experiences and give follow-up support. Daw Nyo Nyo San said that during the implementation period of the Rights for All project, a total of 24 cases were referred to Inn Sein May. In addition to referring cases for legal and other services, Inn Sein May provides education to communities on their rights, such as to receive a National Registration Card without paying a bribe.



Nyo Nyo San and her team prepare to visit to villages to conduct basic Human Rights training.



A member of Inn Sein May meets a community member to provide information about community services.

“

It can't be assumed there were no cases of gender-based violence in the past because we hadn't heard about them; it is just that they were not identified. We tend to only talk about good things in our communities, but I'm happy now that people have the courage to bring up these kind of cases and help the victims

Nyo Nyo San,
founder and director of Inn Sein May.



According to Nyo Nyo San, more work is still needed to bring awareness to communities about human rights concepts and where to report violations. In particular, she said community sensitization is needed on gender-based violence concepts, including identifying GBV, recognizing its harmful effects, and reducing stigma, especially

related to domestic violence. Nyo Nyo San said that following human rights training and follow-up support, she has seen communities increasingly contact Inn Sein May for assistance with reporting cases. She gave one example of a case of sexual violence which was referred to Inn Sein May through the survivor's friend, who had attended Inn Sein



Nyo Nyo San facilitates basic human rights training in her community.

May's human rights training. The survivor's case had initially been settled outside of the legal system by a village administrator, who had arranged for the perpetrator to provide material compensation to the town as punishment, for which the survivor was not satisfied. Daw Nyo Nyo San provided psychosocial support to the survivor and

supported her to follow up with the village administrator about referring the case to the police. Following the referral, the case went through the legal system and a verdict was reached.

LUM ZAWNG, RIGHTS ACTIVIST

The Rights for All project reserves funds to support human rights defenders with expenses related to legal fees, documentation, bail, access to justice centers, transfer of legal cases and collecting human rights violation case information.

Lum Zawng is a lawyer and political activist from Kachin State. He conducts seminars, workshops and dialogue events that promote community awareness on the law and human rights.

In April and May 2018, Lum Zawng played a leading role in peaceful demonstrations in

Myitkyina, Kachin State. The demonstrations called on the military to allow humanitarian access and safe passage to displaced persons trapped in the midst of escalating conflict between the Myanmar military and Kachin Independence Army. Lum Zawng and two fellow activists were sentenced 6 months imprisonment for criminal defamation of the military.

While in prison, the Rights for All Project provided cash assistance to support Lum Zawng.

Lum Zawng speaks with his staff members in front of his small office.





Lum Zawng meets with people at displaced-person camp in Myitkyina.





Ning Thiha, Ning Aie Com and Ning Eim Chan from the New Mon State Party in front of the communication office

TRANSFERRING HUMAN RIGHTS KNOWLEDGE THROUGH NON-STATE ACTORS

In addition to working with the Myanmar government administration, the Rights for All Project provides support to non-state actors to strengthen coordination and have a broader reach in communities.

One non-state actor the Rights for All Project supports is the New Mon State Party (Mon Pyin Thit Party), to strengthen their understanding of and ability to promote human rights in their region. Since it was established in July 1958, the New Mon State Party has advocated for constitutional and political reforms.

The party also collaborates with local NGOs and civil society organizations to promote community development. In March 2018, the Rights for All Project provided training to representatives of the party on human rights and social accountability.

According to Ning Thiha, secretary of the Mon Rural Development Committee, the training enabled them to increase their transparency, strengthen their governance policies to promote accountability, and improve communication practices.



Ning Aie Com and Ning Eim
Chan walk towards the
New Mon State Party office

ADDING HUMAN RIGHTS ASPECT TO HEALTH CARE SERVICES

The Backpack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) was established in 1989 by Dr. Cynthia Maung, a Karen physician who fled Burma that year as a result of her involvement with pro-democracy activities. The aim of BPHWT is to empower local communities to provide primary healthcare services to underserved populations in conflict-affected areas of Myanmar, particularly where international humanitarian organizations cannot reach.

In recent years, the program has expanded to new areas of Myanmar, including Kachin State. The Kachin Backpack Health Worker Team was established by Gum Grawng Aung Hkam, chairman of the Kachin Democratic Party, in April 2009, and now has 18 members.

Zel Khaung, nicknamed Mr. Z, is the team leader in Kachin, and was selected to implement the Rights for All project after partnering with Equality Myanmar. His team had completed an 8-month medic training

course under Dr. Cynthia Maung in Mae Sot. Since returning to Kachin, the Kachin Backpack Health Worker Team has trained traditional birth assistants, 18 village Health workers, and 23 first aid workers in rural areas throughout the state, including remotesplaces such as Puta-O township, where limited or no health services are available.

In 2018, the Kachin Backpack Health Worker Team received a grant from the Rights for All project to address core human rights issues in their community.

Mr. Z said in remote villages of Kahin, poverty and lack of education are key barriers to understanding human rights.

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Receiving grant from EQMM not only extends our reach to community but also add Human Rights agenda in our health care services.

Zel Khaung @ Mr. Z





Mr. Z gives health care of wounded man



Kachin Back Pack Health worker team provides Health Care service

After receiving human rights training from the Rights for All Project, the backpacker team has integrated human rights awareness-raising into their services in rural areas, including women's empowerment trainings and basic human rights trainings in the community.

According to Mr. Z, many communities lack knowledge about what constitutes rights

violations and the importance of reporting cases. He noted that gender-based violence often goes unreported, instead settled between families through the village administration.

The backpack health worker trainings encourage survivors of sexual and gender-based violence to report cases to the district hospital and explain the value of doing so.



Kachin Back Pack Health worker team facilitates women's empowerment workshop.





Kachin Back Pack Health Worker team visits their community member house.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES



Collaboration between development organizations and government institutions is critical in the promotion and protection of human rights. In Myanmar, much of this responsibility falls under the department of social welfare (DSW), part of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement.

In 2014, Myanmar released its National Social Protection Strategic Plan, aiming to promote human and socio-economic development, strengthen resilience to cope with disasters, enable productive investments and improve social cohesion, with a focus on vulnerable groups including youth, women, persons with disabilities, elderly, and ex-drug addicts. U Bo Bo Wai Maung, minister for the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and U Zaw Min, director of the Department of Social Welfare from Hpa-An, said that the ministry seeks to abide by human rights principles in all activities, including prevention, protection and rehabilitation programs for vulnerable groups.

U Bo Bo Wai Maung,
minister for the Ministry of
Social Welfare, Relief and
Resettlement

DSW's services include providing monthly cash assistance to the elderly and pregnant women, as well as social services for survivors of gender-based violence, through a safe house, cash assistance for victims, and case management across 37 townships.

U Zaw Min said that communities seem more comfortable reporting social welfare cases than in the past, which he credits to collaboration among civil society organizations and NGOs including the Local Resource Center. In particular, the two have collaborated to jointly assess information about vulnerable communities and issues, collect community perspectives on service needs, and to raise awareness about services available for vulnerable groups through DSW.

“In the past, people were afraid to report cases to authorities, but now they are more confident to report cases because of the strong collaboration between NGOs and the government.” - U Zaw Min, director of the Department of Social Welfare.

During the project implementation, a total of 45 cases, mostly rape and gender based violence cases have been referred to DSW. To strengthen its services, DSW said additional funds were needed from the union level to better address complex cases involving law enforcement and legal issues.

U Bo Bo Wai Maung added that difficulty for government staff to communicate with residents due to language differences, with some community members preferring to speak Karen, is another challenge his office faces, and suggested that communication materials should also be prepared in Karen if funds are available.



U Zaw Min, Director of the department of Social Welfare

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“In the past, people were afraid to report cases to authorities, but now they are more confident to report cases because of the strong collaboration between NGOs and the government.”

Zaw Min,
director of the Department of Social Welfare.

DAWEI LAWYERS GROUP

Dawei Lawyers' Group was established in 2012 by Ko Ye' Lay Myint of Paung Ku, a Civil Society Organization operating at that time in Dawei. The lawyers group focuses on providing pro bono services supporting the economically vulnerable, with a focus on women and children. Today, the group has 7 lawyers.

Before partnering with the Local Resource Center beginning in 2017, the lawyers group's services focused more on land rights issues and supporting communities to access compensation when land was confiscated for commercial use or soil quality affected by chemical contamination from factory waste.

While some villagers in Dawei possess land tenure certificates, many have been practicing customary land tenure without formal documentation.

Outdated data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development also creates challenges in relation to land tenure. MaThet Thet Zin, head of Dawei Lawyers' Group, described the difficulties of supporting villagers with land tenure issues, with some villagers unable to maintain their land because their legal paperwork was considered incomplete by government. Ma Thet Thet Zin said that many villagers lacked sufficient knowledge about land rights issues, making it difficult for them to hold onto land which was claimed by the government.

In 2015, the Dawei Lawyers' Group gradually shifted their focus towards women and child rights, while continuing organizing seminars in the community about land rights issues.

Thet Thet Zin talks with her client in front of a court in Dawei.



In February 2017, the group signed a memorandum of understanding with Local Resource Center - LRC for its Rights for All project, enabling them to reach four more townships and strengthen their existing activities by adding the topic of human rights to their seminars.

“People’s knowledge of their rights is very little. As a consequence, they end up remain silent when their rights are violated.” - Thet Thet Zin, Dawei Lawyers’ Group lawyer
The Dawei Lawyer’s Group also focuses on the topic of gender-based violence.

Due to the social stigma around gender-based violence as well as fear of involving police, cases are often concealed by community members including village leaders or mediated outside of the law, resulting in financial compensation without further legal justice. Victim-blaming is also common, serving as a further barrier for survivors to access justice.

To raise awareness about gender-based violence concepts and increase sensitivity, Dawei Lawyers’ Group has organized seminars and discussions with the community. “Previously, very few community members were familiar with legal terms and concepts related to rights violations. Disseminating tailored messages to different groups of audience is helpful for them to understand their rights,” said Daw Thet Thet Zin.

“*People’s knowledge of their rights is very little. As a consequence, they end up remain silent when their rights are violated*”

From left to right: Myat Cherry Oo, Thet Thet Zin, Win Thein Oo, Sandar Myint, Aye San, Yin Yin Aye





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Local Resource Centre

