

# **Myanmar Country Report**

## **ASEAN Regional Conference on**

### **Sharing of Good Practices in Social Protection for**

#### **Women in Enterprise Development**

**December 4-5, 2014, Manila, Philippines**

#### **Introduction**

Myanmar is in rapid transition. Its hallmarks are democratic governance and rule of law; national unity and peace via reconciliation with political parties and ethnic armed organizations; market-oriented economic reforms, inclusive growth, bottom-up planning and decentralization; improved management of government institutions; collaboration with the international community and Myanmar's diaspora; media reform. Despite this progress, greater investments are needed to ensure that women and girls benefit equally with men and boys from these socio-economic reforms. This would fulfill State commitments to gender equality and women's rights, which are also critical for sustainable human development and the sustainability of Myanmar's reform process. The government's reform agenda is framed generically, with little to suggest that it addresses gender equality and women's rights comprehensively and that it responds to gender and other interfacing inequalities.

#### **Economic background of Myanmar**

Myanmar has a momentous opportunity for advancing its development and raising the standard of living for its population. Being located besides the two fastest-growing economies in the world (People's Republic of China and India) and middle-income Thailand and combined with expected higher budget revenues from the booming resource sector provides the country with tremendous potential for economic growth and development over long term.

#### **Framework for Economic and Social Reform**

The framework for economic and social reform (FESR) has been drafted in order to push the ongoing reforms forward and to accelerate Myanmar's greater integration into the international community. Policies emphasize on agro-based industrial development, equitable sharing of resources among the regions and the states of the country, promoting local and foreign investments, effective implementation of people-centered development, and poverty reduction. Key measures include land reform, improvement of access to credit and creating job opportunities.

## **Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) development**

The government has prioritized SME development in its economic agenda. The SME center has established to develop an SME policy and action plan for SME development. It intended to draft SME legislation to provide SME center with stronger mandates for establishing institutional coordination among the different line ministries.

## **State Economic Enterprises(SEE) reform**

In Myanmar ,there are over 300 SEEs supervised by the Ministry of Industry , Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation and Ministry of Energy. Among others, many of the SEEs have public sector obligations. The SEEs are a major drag on private sector development and economic growth. The government is looking at ways to start privatizing some of these SEEs and established a Privatization Commission under the office of the Vice President.

## **Women and Economic empowerment in Myanmar**

In Myanmar, indeed ,the role of women's participation in private sector has been growing decade by decade. Women-owned businesses become a powerful force in today's economy and the efforts of their businesses are faster growing segment among SMEs business for the whole nation .The prominent industries are mostly agro-related rice mills, spinning and weaving mills, flour mills, pulses and beans processing factories, edible oil mills, garments , gems and jewelry , construction, etc...

## **Economic empowerment of Vulnerable women and girls**

The Department of Social Welfare is implementing (8) focal areas including the welfare of women .Regarding this, the department runs (3) training schools for girls(young orphan girls of 5-18 yr);(4) vocational training centers for women(vulnerable women 18+yr);(2) women's development centers;(2) centers for women care(women prisoners affected by HIV/AIDS);(7) schools of home sciences for the women who acquire to vocational training ; and (2) shelters for trafficked victims. Moreover ,voluntary organizations have established (10) shelters for the vulnerable women and many NGOs activated for women's rights are also actively carrying out the community based women's protection activities .Some of these institutions provide formal education while the rest are providing vocational trainings ,economic opportunities and job replacement for women.

## **Social Protection**

Myanmar is a party to the October 2013 [ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection](#), which was adopted by all ten ASEAN nations at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Summit in Brunei Darussalam. The

Declaration was guided by the commitments set out in the [ASEAN Charter](#) concerning the need for equitable access to opportunities for human development, social welfare and justice. It also reflected the commitment to social protection that was highlighted in the [ASEAN Roadmap on the Attainment of the Millennium Development Goals in ASEAN](#), as well as the findings of a series of regional convening from 2011-2013, including the recommendations of the [2012 Regional Workshop on Social Protection and Promoting Social Services for Vulnerable Groups](#).

The process of the development of Myanmar's social protection strategy started at the first National Social Protection Conference (2012). At the Conference, His Excellency President U Thein Sein urged the development of a national social protection system based on the needs of different social groups and sectors (including children and women, the vulnerable, the aged and people with disabilities), ensuring that the social protection policy be developed and aligned with the second phase of the Government's overall reform strategy, and specifically linking social protection with the Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Strategies. As a result of the conference, several coordination meetings were held among Government officials, development partners, and INGOS.

## **Basic Concepts**

Every government system has two essential components: government (governance) and public (its people). The government system needs to pay particular attention to the poor (people living under a minimum standard), which is a significant percentage of the population.

According to modern political principles, in every country there is an agreed social contract between government and the public. The social contract defines a mutual agreement between government and its people for their duties and responsibilities. A fundamental aspect of the mutual agreement is that the people provide government with legitimacy, and the government in return provides the people with security and protection.

There are a variety of ways that government protects its people including protection in terms of security, protection in terms of economic growth, and protection in terms of social issues. All of these aspects of protection are guided by policy and strategy. For example, legal instruments represent the strategy and principles needed to protect people's lives and security; economic policy supports economic development, social policies and strategies aim to secure the social development and safety of the people. Thus, the social contract represents a mutual responsibility and affiliation between government and the public. Social protection, through this social contract, will bring about greater social cohesion and equity. As highlighted in the Framework for Economic and Social Reforms (FESR), social protection functions as a "circuit breaker" for inter-generational cycles of poverty and hunger.

## Definition of Social Protection

Social protection for the purposes of the Myanmar Strategy is defined as policies, legal instruments, programmes, benefits and services for individuals and households that prevent and alleviate economic and social vulnerabilities, promote access to essential services and infrastructure and economic opportunity, and facilitate the ability to better manage and cope with shocks that arise from humanitarian emergencies and/or sudden loss of income. In order to implement the social protection strategy and to develop a social protection system, the government has defined its objectives, strategy, master plan and detailed activity plan. Where necessary, for example with the establishment of new programmes, the Government will develop a policy for the development of the social protection strategy.

## Aspects of Social Protection

The Myanmar Social Protection Strategy and policy will be based on the following aspects of social protection:

**Protective Social Protection** – programs that offer vulnerable groups relief from economic and social deprivation, and that reduce poverty and vulnerabilities. These programmes include access to basic social services and provision of social assistance.

**Preventive Social Protection** – programs that prevent risks and shocks as well as well as measures to mitigate the loss of income following a shock. In addition to ensuring access to basic social services, preventive social protection addresses income security, employment opportunity and health security.

**Promotive Social Protection** – promotes human capital development programs in addition to the above mentioned 2 features of social protection. It includes the programs assisting households to invest more in human capital development and productivity.

**Transformative social protection** – programs that focus on equity and social cohesion along with socio-economic development.

Based on the current economic, social and political situation of Myanmar (see Action Plan), the development and implementation of social protection programs will focus mainly on the protective aspects of social protection. Despite the main focus of the programs on protective aspects, the concept of preventive social protection is also reflected in the programs.

## Objective and vision

The objective of the Strategy is to support poor and marginalized people who are facing social and economic hardships and to assist them to recover and to reintegrate in social and economic life.

The vision for social protection is an inclusive, equitable and sustainable system that:

- Contributes to human capital by facilitating access to essential social services, such as education, health, housing and water;
- Protects people from risks and shocks;
- Addresses economic and social vulnerabilities and food insecurity over the life cycle and promotes economic opportunities; and
- Addresses social exclusion.

Those who are in need of protection are:

- Those who are facing social and economic hardships;
- Those who are marginalized; and
- Those who are at risk of and/or subject to natural disaster

### **Social Protection Programme to be Implemented**

Myanmar strategy on social protection will put a special focus on the vulnerable groups of pregnant women and early childhood, school age and youth ,working age/adulthood, elderly people, persons with disabilities, vulnerable and marginalized groups , Those who are at risk of and/or subject to natural disaster by integrated social protection services .

### **Gaps and challenges in implementing social protection programs for women in MSMEs**

- Public is lack of awareness on gender issues and lack of knowledge in related laws & practices .
- Business sectors are still dominated by men.
- Strong harmonization among public & private sectors is needed to empower women economically
- Limited role model of women entrepreneur in the society.

### **Conclusion**

Myanmar is in the process of developing National Social Protection Strategy in line with State's policies. Currently, the first draft on National Social Protection Policy and Strategic Plan was developed by the technical support group cooperating with UNICEF(Myanmar),World Bank, International Labour Organization ,World Food Programme , HelpAge International and civil societies. Once it is approved by the cabinet and the parliament , implementation on the strategy will be started. Myanmar is making concerted efforts for social protection for women in enterprises development in collaboration with partners and ASEAN member nations.