



Evaluation

# WAVES: Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality in Myanmar 2019–2022



## **WAVES: Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality in Myanmar 2019–2022**

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November 2022

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# Foreword

RECOFTC believes in a future in which people live equitably and sustainably in and beside healthy, resilient forests. One of its four strategic goals focuses on social inclusion and gender equality, whereby women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and other vulnerable groups are an active and empowered part of forest management.

RECOFTC recognizes that gender equality and equity are matters of fundamental human rights and social justice and a precondition for sustainable forest governance and the achievement of its goals. It uses an equity-oriented intersectional approach to help expand the representation and leadership of women and other excluded groups. This approach helps increase their access to income and other economic assets, promote gender-inclusive policy and extension mechanisms and tackle root barriers, including harmful gender norms, practices and knowledge gaps.

Tackling these long-standing inequalities and structural barriers to gender inequality is a complex process that requires dedicated attention and resourcing. RECOFTC established Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality, or WAVES, based on the idea that having stronger leadership and expertise will improve policymaking and investments in ways that promote gender equality and social inclusion. RECOFTC has positioned and engaged with WAVES as a regional network that leads, inspires and sustains long-lasting changes. WAVES operates in partnership with “gender leaders” who are change intermediaries creating context-relevant inclusive solutions that work for women, Indigenous Peoples and youth across the forest landscapes.

The WAVES results from the first nearly three years of the program, which are captured in this report, demonstrate innovative approaches, such as how engaging gender leaders and supporting them in determining national and organization-based gender issues and priorities can lead to locally acceptable and sustainable solutions. The results also showcase the absolute value in power-sharing and inclusive engagement for co-creating long-term solutions on topics of gender and social inequalities.

The type and spectrum of changes brought about by the gender leaders that were evaluated for this report differed among them but were contextually relevant and significant.

We invite you to take time to read this report and learn about WAVES and its gender leaders who have led different initiatives to make the forestry landscapes more equal and inclusive. We hope that WAVES will inspire you to be a gender leader, with each one of you taking actions to realize a more inclusive and equal world, especially in the forest landscapes.

## **David Ganz**

Executive Director, RECOFTC

## **Kalpana Giri**

WAVES Program Manager, RECOFTC

# Acknowledgements

The research report was produced under the technical oversight of Kalpana Giri, now the former Senior Program Officer for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality, RECOFTC and who also managed the WAVES program. Independent consultant Dibya Gurung, who is the Coordinator of Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management in Nepal, collected and analysed the data and wrote the report.

Khin Thiri Htun, the WAVES country focal point, reviewed the country report and provided technical inputs. Vanessa Hongsathiviz and Julian Atkinson from RECOFTC provided technical inputs to finalize the report.

RECOFTC recognizes the partnership with and engagement from the gender leaders and their organizations in the WAVES network in Myanmar: Thazin Phyo, Food and Agriculture Myanmar; Khin Nyein Nyein Mon, Myanmar Environment Rehabilitation-Conservation Network; and Nu Ra, Promotion of Indigenous and Nature Together.

RECOFTC is thankful to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency for funding WAVES.



# Executive summary

Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality, or WAVES, is a RECOFTC initiative that promotes gender equality in the governance of forest landscapes in the Asia–Pacific region.

WAVES built a network of 36 gender leaders from seven countries where RECOFTC works. In Myanmar, three gender leaders (one from a United Nations agency and two from civil society organizations) involved in forest management and gender equality were supported in advocating for social and gender-equitable programs in their communities and institutions.

In early 2021, two years into the program, an evaluation was conducted at country and regional scale to document the initial results and learnings. Gender leaders, partner organizations and stakeholders provided inputs.

The evaluation found that the program triggered a range of results and changes among WAVES leaders and partners at the individual and institutional levels. Gender leaders reported personal and professional growth in their ability to articulate gender and inclusion concepts, formulate effective plans and strategies and influence high-level policymakers and community leaders through negotiation and advocacy.

In Myanmar, WAVES-supported gender leaders conducted a gender assessment and developed gender guidelines and tools for forest projects. They organized several webinars and workshops, including the Gender Equality in Forestry and Experiences and Insights of Female Foresters in Myanmar for practitioners, policymakers and local authorities. The gender leaders joined the national Gender Equality Network and this expanded the WAVES network for technical collaboration.

The evaluation process documented several lessons:

- An accurate understanding of the capacity of stakeholders that allows for reasonable timelines for complex activities and the ability of stakeholders to commit to long-term workplans are all important determinants of project success.
- Gender action plans can be most effective when they are demand-driven, results-oriented and context-specific.
- Understanding and being responsive to intersectionality is important to achieving inclusion and equity.
- Financial support for WAVES-like interventions must be scaled-up to achieve more widespread and sustainable impacts. Enabling follow-up action and partnerships is crucial to sustaining the momentum created through the activities made possible by WAVES.

# The evaluation

## About WAVES

Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality, or WAVES, is a RECOFTC initiative that promotes gender equality in the governance, management and use of forest landscapes and their resources in the Asia-Pacific region. RECOFTC implemented the three-year WAVES program from March 2019 to September 2022. It was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

RECOFTC established WAVES based on the idea that having stronger leadership and expertise will improve policymaking and investments in ways that promote gender equality and social inclusion more broadly. Creating transformative change requires identifying and supporting individuals working in natural resources management who can advocate for and negotiate such change on an institutional level.

The WAVES initiative so far has built a network of 36 gender leaders from seven countries where RECOFTC works: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam. Although the WAVES program has ended, RECOFTC continues supporting the gender leaders as they advocate for equality and lead gender-equitable programs in their communities and institutions.

The gender leaders across the region include technical experts, senior government officials, politicians, academics, directors and officers of civil society organizations, local community leaders, business managers and a journalist.

WAVES has equipped them with the knowledge and capacity to understand, design and implement gender-equality measures in forest landscapes. It has built up women's leadership skills to promote gender equality across public agencies, the private sector and local communities. And it has worked with men as allies to support gender equality.

WAVES has supported the leaders to integrate gender equality into policies, investments and actions. WAVES has helped the gender leaders maximize their potential by cultivating leadership skills and providing technical and financial support as they implemented action plans. Through regular mentoring and ad hoc psychosocial support, WAVES has helped the gender leaders create new narratives and visions in leading gender equality efforts and amplify their work by linking them with wider networks and collaborators.

With support from the WAVES team, the gender leaders have learned to challenge conventional ways of thinking and promote gender equality in policies and processes related to climate change, REDD+ and forestry, forest law enforcement, governance and trade. And they have revived and are driving the gender agenda to remind their society that the goal is inclusion and social justice for all.

The WAVES program is part of RECOFTC's dedicated effort to achieve its strategic goal 4 on social inclusion, gender equality and public action. In its work, RECOFTC tackles



systemic inequities and marginalization prevalent in the natural resource landscapes by using a participatory approach of critical framing and co-engagement and co-creation of knowledge.

### **Four pillars of the WAVES program**

WAVES was designed using participatory action research principles to activate self-discovery, analysis and actions (referred to as “co-creation”) through a regional network of gender leaders.

Participatory learning and action were activated by using participatory engagement approaches that allowed for taking into account the gender leaders’ demand-driven needs and priorities. Multiple strategies were employed to address intersecting barriers and drivers of gender inequality. The four pillars outlined here are part of the co-creation structure put in place to cultivate discovery and actions.

#### **Demand-driven**

- The gender leaders were selected for their commitment to gender issues and on their ability to work on context-specific issues and achieve results. They were involved in the program’s conception and through its implementation.
- Before launching the program, the WAVES manager and focal points from the seven countries where RECOFTC works conducted informal outreach and national-level discussions with potential gender leaders. Together, they identified gender issues relevant to the national context and priorities and assessed potential positive outcomes as well as challenges, conflicts and barriers. And they planned risk mitigation strategies.

#### **The gender leaders were selected based on the following criteria**

- **Demonstrated commitment:** They had experience with initiatives on gender and social inclusion work in forestry but were limited by the institutional set-up or facing resistance.
- **Understanding of gender issues and activities:** They had some level of understanding of gender issues, activities and changes that result from interventions and barriers.
- **Scope of manoeuvrability:** They had a mandate to create institutional influence over people working on gender, policy or planning who provide opportunities to influence institutional changes and were willing to lead work on these areas.
- **Diversity of partners to deliver different changes:** They had collaborated with a wide group of organizations and people who can bring diverse levels of changes from the policy level to practice, with a good representation of state and non-state actors and the private sector.
- **Period of engagement:** They were willing to commit to working with the WAVES program for three years (2019–2022).
- **English proficiency:** They had a working level of English sufficient to participate fully in the program.

## Participatory engagement approach

- **Meaningful engagement:** WAVES created spaces for deliberation and dialogue. It enabled ownership, power-sharing, knowledge co-creation and multifaceted engagement strategies. The gender leaders were involved in every step, from program scoping and implementation to unpacking tensions and nuanced resistance that they encountered. They adopted methodologies for implementation to unpack tensions and nuanced resistance that they encountered. Problems and solutions, including unintended changes and resistance, were analysed as a group. The program's methods were defined by the participatory approach and power-sharing between the WAVES team and the gender leaders.
- **Tailored capacities:** WAVES provided the gender leaders with targeted and timely support at the regional and national levels. They were offered trainings and workshops on various gender concepts and skill sets, based on each leader's specific skills, needs and interests to implement their action plan.
- **Learning space:** WAVES created learning channels to connect gender leaders at the national and regional levels to share their accomplishments, challenges and pitfalls in a safe and trusting environment. WAVES focal points in each country moderated the learning channel at the national level.
- **Results-oriented:** WAVES provided support to the individual gender leaders to implement their action plan and to link with other RECOFTC programs to expand their outreach and garner more support.

## Intersectional interventions

- Different types of interventions were needed for the gender leaders to implement their respective action plan.
- The WAVES program design employed diverse strategies and actions to address gender gaps and structural barriers and to mitigate emerging risks and reduce opportunity costs.
- Technical and financial support was provided at the regional and national levels to roll out interventions.
- Interventions were undertaken to promote inclusive change at the individual and institutional levels.

## Institutionalization and enabling systems

- The WAVES program design emphasized feedback loops to formal and informal spaces and governance procedures so that efforts to achieve gender equality extended to the institutional system to address systemic inequalities.
- A system of direct communication channels, such as the WAVES focal points working directly with the RECOFTC regional WAVES team, was developed for leveraging influence and encouraging adaptive planning and strategizing.
- The gender leaders mobilized their network in the country to support one another and create communication loops between informal networks and formal systems.

- Individual leadership approaches were used to influence institutional shifts within the gender leaders' organizations through policy changes, mandates, budgets and other means.
- The gender leaders were connected to a larger audience and network outside of their institutions and forestry circle for collective advocacy and amplification.

Of the 36 selected gender leaders from the seven countries where RECOFTC works, 31 are women and five are men.

## About the evaluation: Purpose and framework

When the program was more than two years into its operation, a regional evaluation was conducted in 2021 by independent consultant Dibya Devi Gurung, in close collaboration with the then-WAVES program manager Kalpana Giri, the WAVES country focal points and the gender leaders.

The overarching objective of the evaluation was to review and identify the results and learnings effected by the WAVES program thus far. The consultant interviewed gender leaders, partners and stakeholders from all seven countries.

The approach of the evaluation was based on the principles and practices of participatory learning.<sup>1</sup> The gender leaders were guided through a process of self-reflection and assessment through several facilitated workshops and individual discussions.

### Framework for evaluating individual and institutional change

The framework for individual and institutional change,<sup>2</sup> which was also used to design the WAVES program, was adapted for the evaluation. The framework focused on changes that took place at two distinct but interrelated levels.

**Individual change:** The individual performance and behaviour change of the gender leaders were assessed based on their understanding of gender and leadership concepts and how they were able to apply these concepts to their personal and professional lives. The evaluation also considered informal changes, such as increased confidence and capacities of leaders on gender integration into the efforts they have led towards influencing internal policies and programs.

**Institutional change:** The evaluation examined how WAVES effected changes in each of the gender leaders' institution of employment or affiliation in terms of its programs, policies, structures and work culture. It considered both informal changes, such as each institution's networks, peers, norms and values, and formal changes, such as introduction of policies and programs to support gender equality.

### Evaluation process

The evaluation process was guided by a framework designed by the RECOFTC WAVES

team with the consultant and the gender leaders. The framework was used as a guide to examine the WAVES results at the country and regional levels. The following describes the evaluation process.

### **Design and framework for evaluation**

- The design and framework were developed by RECOFTC in consultation with the consultant and gender leaders.
- A workshop was organized to create a common understanding of the evaluation framework among the consultant, the gender leaders and the WAVES RECOFTC team.
- The evaluation framework was then used to facilitate the country and regional evaluations.
- The evaluation was designed at two levels: First, country workshops and meetings aimed to draw out evidence and learnings from across the countries. Second, learnings from the national evaluations were condensed for a regional perspective and shared at a regional evaluation workshop in March 2021.

### **Project documentation**

The evaluation drew on all project documentation:

- WAVES concept report
- WAVES framework
- Country reports
- Meeting minutes
- Case studies
- Documents related to participatory action research, gender and leadership

### **Meetings and workshops conducted for the evaluation**

As noted, the evaluation approached the WAVES work at three levels:

- Country evaluation workshops. The country-level evaluations were conducted within a span of two months, from February through March. The evaluation at each country level was pursued with a mixed approach of face-to-face meetings, virtual workshops, interviews and group discussion. Three onsite (physical) workshops were achieved, one each in Nepal, Lao PDR and Viet Nam. One virtual workshop was conducted in Indonesia. Interviews and discussions were conducted in Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar. The gender leaders shared their progress, learnings and achievements with examples and evidence during these events. The country-level workshops and meetings were used to assess the achievements, results, gaps and possibilities that gender leaders had observed through their engagement with WAVES to date. The information derived through the country evaluation process was then synthesized and consolidated to draw out the results and learnings at the regional level.
- Regional workshop. A three-day regional workshop in March gave the gender leaders and their stakeholders the opportunity to present and discuss their results, learnings, challenges, opportunities and recommendations with all stakeholders, including partner and donor agencies.

- Meetings. Two meetings were arranged between the consultant and RECOFTC WAVES team to discuss and provide feedback on the draft reports. In addition, several rounds of in-depth discussions with the RECOFTC's WAVES manager, the seven WAVES country teams and the RECOFTC communication and learning experts were organized to gain a better understanding of the context and to validate the findings.

### **Limitations of the evaluation**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation had to be conducted virtually. This made it difficult to discern behaviour changes and expansion of informal spaces, especially through the remote interviews. The pandemic made it unrealistic to visit the gender leaders' workspaces and conduct face-to-face interviews with them and their colleagues, subordinates, supervisors and partners, which could have provided insights of the gender leaders' leadership practices and their influence on their colleagues' behaviours and institutional norms for gender integration. This also limited the face-to-face interaction with the WAVES leaders, except in Nepal, where the consultant is based.

# WAVES in Myanmar

## Gender leaders

RECOFTC supported three WAVES leaders from two civil society organizations and one United Nations agency working on forestry and environmental conservation: the Myanmar Environment Rehabilitation–Conservation Network, the Promotion of Indigenous and Nature Together and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Myanmar.

The gender leaders were carefully selected based on their commitment to gender activities, their scope to create changes in policies and practices at the national and local levels and their potential to affect gender transformative shifts in their respective organization. The program’s main objective is to promote gender-inclusive participatory approaches in forestry policies and community activities.

	Name	Organization	Position
1.	Thazin Phyo <sup>3</sup>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Myanmar (international organization)	Technical Project Assistant, National Forest Inventory/ National Forest Monitoring and Information System Project
2.	Khin Nyein Nyein Mon	Myanmar Environment Rehabilitation Conservation Network (civil society)	Program Officer, Communication, Networking and Gender
3.	Nu Ra <sup>4</sup>	Promotion of Indigenous and Nature Together (civil society)	Program Officer

## Implementation of the WAVES approach

As this section elaborates, RECOFTC provided step-by-step, demand-based inputs and some financial support to each WAVES leader to implement their specific plan to meet the program’s objectives. The focus in Myanmar was on strengthening community forestry networks to include and better represent women, particularly ethnic and marginalized women.

Within Myanmar, the WAVES approach evolved with the following primary inputs.

### Country-level scoping meetings

The RECOFTC WAVES focal point in each country was oriented on the overall WAVES approach and provided them with guiding criteria to help them identify prospective



partners and gender leaders. One country-level scoping meeting and one-on-one in-depth discussions were arranged with prospective participants to assess their vision for gender equality in forestry work, to map out major barriers they faced to integrate gender equality into their work and to understand their interest to engage with a program like WAVES. After a few months of careful preparation by the RECOFTC country team and scoping meeting, the leaders were selected. They then narrowed down their gender mainstreaming priorities they wanted to implement under the WAVES program.

### **Regional launch, training workshops, coaching, mentoring and technical support**

A regional leadership workshop was organized in Bangkok to launch the WAVES program. The workshop examined training on gender concepts, including negotiation, communication and networking. Participants were encouraged to critically analyse their situation and explore solutions and opportunities for developing their individual action plan based on their needs, priorities and context.

After six months of implementing their action plan, the WAVES gender leaders attended another regional training in Bangkok on relational leadership and gender analysis. This Leadership Pathways and Change workshop focused on developing frameworks on domains of change and gender assessments, managing resistance and self-care, training of trainers with facilitation skills, designing training courses and developing delivery skills.

### **Demonstrated actions**

After returning to their respective organization or institution, the gender leaders started implementing their individual action plan in coordination with the RECOFTC WAVES focal point in the country office. RECOFTC provided some financial support to help them execute their action plans. A network of Myanmar WAVES gender leaders was created to enable regular meetings and exchanges among them.

The RECOFTC WAVES focal point, together with the regional WAVES coordinator based in Bangkok, provided regular support to the gender leaders. They offered technical backstopping, needs-based guidance and regular monitoring and addressed their queries and challenges at the individual, interpersonal and institutional levels. These regular exchanges helped the gender leaders and RECOFTC staff analyse and finetune the needs and challenges to develop demand-based, tailor-made capacity-building programs for them. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the political instability in Myanmar, the planned activities and processes could not be achieved as desired.

The following singles out examples of the WAVES activities that were possible in Myanmar.

## **Opportunities to raise awareness on gender issues in the forestry and environment sectors**

WAVES supported the Ministry of Natural Resources Management and Environmental Conservation to raise awareness on gender issues in the environment sectors on international World Environment Day by exhibiting and distributing posters, brochures, photographs and publications on gender. The WAVES Myanmar team conducted a session on gender concepts at the Stockholm Environment Institute's final workshop on the Chindwin River Basin, conducted in collaboration with the Sagaing Regional Government in Monywa City.

## **Workshops and webinars**

The gender leaders organized several webinars and workshops, including the Gender Equality in Forestry: Fostering Leadership for Inclusive Sustainable Forest Management for Prosperity of People. The workshop was attended by the Shan ethnic minister, members of parliament and representatives from gender- and forestry-related government agencies, civil society groups, national and international NGOs, the private sector and the media.

A webinar on experiences and insights of female foresters in Myanmar discussed the gaps and opportunities for integrating gender equality into the forestry sector. It attracted 48 participants, about 90 percent of whom were women from the forestry sector. Another webinar, on Gender Integration in Forest Management Practice: What Are the Key Issues and What Activities Can Allow Integration?, was organized with the Myanmar team of the Voices for Mekong Forest Project. The webinar provided an overview of gender equality policy provisions in Myanmar and highlighted the benefits of a gender-sensitive forest management program. It was attended by 70 participants, from field-level staff to policymakers in the gender and forestry sectors.

## **Support to develop gender guidelines and tools**

The WAVES Myanmar team coordinated with the Voices for Mekong Forest Project to train its members, to conduct gender assessments and to launch gender guidelines in their project area. The WAVES team helped develop the gender guidelines by mobilizing gender experts to provide technical inputs. They coordinated and developed the terms of reference for a consultant to assist, selected the consultant, guided and monitored the consultant's work and facilitated the engagement of all stakeholders in the process. The guidelines were to be approved in 2021 but due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the political situation, its completion and most activities were postponed.

## **Promoting the WAVES program**

The WAVES gender leaders joined the national Gender Equality Network with the objective of expanding the WAVES network, receiving gender-related information and supporting opportunities for collaboration. The WAVES gender leaders regularly attended their meetings and special events to exchange information about gender-related issues in forestry and the environment. And gender Equality Network experts attended the WAVES meetings and activities, such as webinars and the gender leader meetings, and participated in the gender analysis survey.

## Findings and results

Overall, the WAVES program provided conceptual knowledge, skills and methodologies for viewing and analysing social and gender equality issues from a variety of perspectives and dimensions, as the following highlights.

### **Increased knowledge and skills to analyse and identify gender gaps and opportunities within the forestry and environment sectors**

The gender leaders understand the value of having conceptual knowledge and skills to analyse and identify gender gaps and opportunities in the environment sectors and in society generally. They said that the training they received in Bangkok helped them self-reflect and question the gender situation in their workplaces and in their own lives.

For example, one of the training sessions on self-awareness helped one gender leader discover aspects in her life that she had never considered as issues before and had accepted it as a normal part of her life. She said, “Women in my society and in my workplace are treated unequally, but we do not consider it to be an issue to be discussed. We accept it. We consider it to be normal. But now when I think of it, it is not normal, it is not ordinary. So, we need to understand that first. If we don’t understand that, how can we work for equality? This was eye-opening for me.”

### Thazin Phyo

“I gained knowledge on gender concepts and methods and can apply it in my project’s work,” gender leader Thazin Phyo explained. “Before, I never thought about the gender issues in my project, but now I have started to identify opportunities to integrate them. In 2020, my colleagues and partners recognized my role and contributions to gender, and I feel motivated to do more and learn more in the future.

“My current work is not directly related to gender, and it will be a challenge for me to continue learning and applying it. The gender activities implemented by the WAVES Myanmar team is an opportunity to stay engaged and learn more.

“At the start of the WAVES program, I had very little knowledge about gender issues in the workplace. Now I am considered a gender expert in my professional area.”

### **Initiated a process to integrate gender equality goals into the government, universities, the private sector and communities**

The COVID-19 pandemic and Myanmar's unpredictable political climate had an impact on the working environment. Despite this, the gender leaders were able to begin a process of gender integration within their sectors and with their partners, such as:

- A Gender Facility Team was established in the Forest Department to train staff on gender analysis and integration.
- The gender leaders were involved in guiding partners to develop gender guidelines for civil society groups working in the forestry sector.
- The gender leaders and RECOFTC worked with the University of Forest and Environmental Science to improve their curriculum on gender-equitable and gender-inclusive forest management and governance.
- The gender leaders supported the formation of the women's community forestry network and linked it with the wider landscape-level community forest network and other multistakeholder working groups at the local and national levels, with the aim to integrate gender into these networks.
- The gender leaders worked with journalism institutions to integrate gender into their training program to create gender awareness and to influence the different media channels to cover news and stories from a gender perspective.

### **Better prepared and confident to work on gender equality issues**

The intensive, long-term WAVES training process has instilled both confidence and readiness among the gender leaders to lead the work on gender equality. They said they now have the knowledge and skills to adapt the WAVES training package to train people and provide inputs from gender perspectives in their policy documents, strategies and planning processes. As one of the gender leaders remarked, "I have figured out where I stand and what kind of support I need to manage the resistance and integrate gender within the community forestry. With adequate support I know I am ready to take the challenge."

### **Gender as a subject has fostered openness in community forestry**

Within the forestry sector, including the community forestry management system, social topics such as gender are not considered integral and therefore are not a priority. With the series of trainings, workshops and webinars that WAVES organized in Myanmar, the gender leaders believe that a gradual acceptance can now be observed.

According to one of the gender leaders, "Acceptance by the technical staff [in government agencies] has been one of the biggest achievements. Before, when gender was mentioned, they would say, "We are here to do community forestry, not gender." But now with the webinars, trainings, presentations and interventions in various forums and meetings, they listen to us and see the connection between forest management and gender."

## Khin Nyein Nyein Mon

Khin Nyein Nyein Mon is from Yangon, where she works at the Myanmar Environment Rehabilitation-Conservation Network, or MERN. It is a national network organization dedicated to forest and environmental conservation.

“I am a program officer responsible for communication and gender integration in forest governance. The forest sector is male dominated, and 99 percent of foresters working in Myanmar are men,” she explained.

“My organization made a brave decision to allow a non-forester like me to work in this technical-oriented field. They expected me to bring different knowledge and skills I had experienced in the non-forestry sectors. I wanted to prove that forest and environmental conservation can be done by whomever is interested in it or passionate about it.

“My belief is that anyone who loves the forest and the environment can go into conservation as a profession. Gender inequality is rooted with the majority of male foresters, which causes a power imbalance in the workplace. I keep reminding my colleagues of gender considerations in project planning and implementation. I also help country facilitators develop forestry-related gender guidelines.

“Inequality exists, even in the office based in Yangon, but those inequalities are seen as normal, [including the] stereotypes, such as men do the primary forestry work and women should only be in supporting roles. Those stereotypes are barriers for women to improve their professional skills and self-confidence and are passed on from generation to generation. They definitely impact workplaces. Working environments need to foster respect among colleagues regardless of gender and stereotyping.

“Until I was halfway into my journey with WAVES, I was struggling to understand the concept of gender equality and how it related to me. The very first WAVES workshop in Bangkok expanded my thoughts about social inclusion, gender equality, intersectionality, toxic masculinity, power influencing and the role of women in the forestry sector.

“After I reflected on what I have experienced and on those key words, I realized that Myanmar is far behind neighbouring countries on gender equality. I can now analyse inequality in our workplace and see the gap between men’s and women’s participation in project areas as well.

“I tried to resist all the negative responses from colleagues, especially senior male colleagues, when I initiated gender integration into projects. But I always take the opportunity to remind them of the importance of gender integration, no matter if they are pleased or not, because it is one of the criteria when implementing projects.

“I reinforce the fact that gender equality is a cross-cutting issue, and we need to be aware of it in every project. I believe that repeating it over and over again creates a memory that they recall every time they start to plan or design projects. As a result, they start to consider gender-sensitive projects whether or not they understand gender integration.

“They started to ask me to contribute to possible activities of gender integration or female participation. Now, they look to me as a resource person for gender integration in projects. It is my biggest achievement throughout my gender integration journey. It was not smooth but [I have now] received attention from male colleagues.

“My journey with WAVES is the best journey ever. It is allowing us to expand our networks and knowledge and understand the importance of self-reflection. We have to understand the issues ourselves first before we raise awareness with colleagues and others. I now see things differently and approach issues from a gender perspective.

“Considering gender issues in our activities and working for women’s

empowerment has become interesting to me now. I have decided to be part of WAVES every time I have an opportunity in the future. I want to have consultation or assistance from WAVES when I need to find solutions to gender issues.

“I have started to develop foundational gender guidelines for the forestry sector to promote women’s empowerment. The guidelines will serve as a reference for integrating gender into projects.”

## Recommendations

- Despite the volatile situation in Myanmar, the gender leaders have started several processes to integrate gender into the forestry and environment sectors. They have kept their networks alive through regular online meetings. Although at a small scale, these processes are very important entry points to integrate gender systematically into the otherwise gender-blind sectors. Some of the actions the gender leaders want to continue include:
  - Support the completion of the gender guidelines for community forestry by hiring a new gender consultant, organizing consultation workshops and translating the guidelines into local languages
  - Expand and support new gender leaders
  - Support an advocacy program with webinars, stories and news through traditional and social media and through the publication of reports
  - Provide support to conduct research and studies on gender and forestry and environment
  - Collaborate and engage with the University of Forestry and Environment Science (on youth leadership, gender research grants to students) and the Forest Department (gender assessment, capacity-building of technical staff, development of guidelines)
- Coordinate with civil society groups, universities, the private sector and like-minded international and national NGOs to bring in more and diverse partners to promote the WAVES training approach
- Seek support to create a critical mass of knowledgeable and skilled people and to review the list of partners to update it as per the country context and as needed



- Review the WAVES training package to include psychosocial support for the gender leaders to deal with the microaggressions they experience and for their emotional health
- Expand and strengthen the component on engaging men and youth and their allyship

# Endnotes

1. Pretty, J.N., Guijt, I., Thompson, J., and Scoones, I., *Participatory Learning and Action: A trainer's guide*, IIED Participatory Methodology Series. London: Sustainable Agriculture Programme, IIED, 1995; WOCAN, *Training Manual-Gender Integration in Planning*, 2011.
2. Gurung, B., and Menter, H., *Mainstreaming Gender-sensitive Participatory Approaches: The CIAT case study*. In *Scaling Up and Out: Achieving Widespread Impact Through Agricultural Research*, D. Pachico, ed. Cali, Colombia: Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical, 2004; WOCAN, *Framework for Assessing Participatory Action Research Program Activities*, 2010.
3. Thazin Phyto joined the WAVES in March 2019 when she was working as Community Engagement Officer in the Wildlife Conservation Society but later shifted her employment to FAO Myanmar.
4. Nu Ra engaged with the WAVES program in March 2019. She is one of the strong and active gender leaders in the Myanmar team. After she attended the series of workshops and trainings under WAVES, she developed the training plan for Indigenous women inclusion in the environmental sector and planned to conduct it in three ethnic areas. In August 2020, she left the WAVES program for personal reasons.

# Annex: Actions undertaken by the gender leaders

	<b>Activities</b>	<b>With whom</b>
1.	Awareness-raising on gender on World Environmental Day organized by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (5 June 2019)	Ministry of Natural Resource Management and Environmental Conservation, line departments and the public
2.	WAVES Myanmar was exhibited in Stockholm Environment Institute's final workshop (7 June 2019)	Minister of Sagiang Region and other government officials, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and civil society organizations
3.	WAVES Myanmar conducted a session on gender concepts in the Building Technical, Communication and Facilitation Skills for Officials from Ministries with Responsibility for Implementing REDD+ Policies and Measures workshop (May 2019)	Officials from ministries
4.	Workshop on Gender Equality in Forestry: Fostering Leadership for Inclusive Sustainable Forest Management for Prosperity of People (30 September 2019)	Shan ethnic minister, members of parliament, gender and forestry-related government agencies, civil society groups, national and international NGOs, the private sector, media and WAVES gender leaders
5.	Webinar on Experiences and Insights of Female Foresters in Myanmar: Gaps, Status and Opportunities of Gender Equality in Forestry Sector (10 July 2020)	Female foresters from academia (teachers and students), the government sector, civil society groups, national and international NGOs, WAVES gender leaders and RECOFTC
6.	Webinar on Gender Integration in Forest Management Practice: What Are the Key Issues and What Activities Can Allow Integration? (28 December 2020)	Non-state actors from Voices for Mekong Forest Project areas, forestry-related government agencies, civil society groups, national and international NGOs, and RECOFTC
7.	Developing gender guidelines for forestry-related civil society organizations (16 August 2020–present, with 50 percent finished in January 2021)	WAVES gender leader, the gender consultant, Forest Department, a forestry-related civil society network, Gender Equality Network and RECOFTC

	<b>Activities</b>	<b>With whom</b>
8.	Regular contact and follow up with the participants from WAVES training of trainers and webinar network (potential WAVES gender leaders) (July 2020–January 2021)	Professors from University of Forestry and Environmental Sciences, Forest Department staff and civil society groups, national and international NGOs staff
9.	Meetings and coordination with Voices for Mekong Forest Project team (November–December 2020)	Voices for Mekong Forest Project team, WAVES Myanmar team, RECOFTC and RECOFTC Myanmar Country Program
10.	Developing webinar story	RECOFTC (RECOFTC Myanmar Country Program, WAVES team at the RECOFTC Main Office, Knowledge Management and Strategic Communication)



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#### RECOFTC

P.O. Box 1111  
Kasetsart Post Office  
Bangkok 10903, Thailand  
T +66 (0)2 940 5700  
F +66 (0)2 561 4880  
info@recoftc.org

    @RECOFTC



recoftc.org

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