GENDER ANALYSIS

1. In the 2011 Gender Inequality Index, Myanmar ranked 96 out of 146 countries, ahead of some other regional developing country members.\(^1\) Myanmar has achieved gender parity in education in terms of the enrollment ratios of girls and boys in primary and secondary education. However, disaggregated analysis points to gender disparities in some of the poorest rural areas. Women in Myanmar enjoy equal rights in inheritance laws and property rights in the case of divorce. However, patriarchal cultural values related to women’s roles and responsibilities still shape familial relationships, contribute to the gendered division of labor, and limit women’s participation in decision making. Key issues of concern include (i) the high maternal mortality ratio and insufficient access to reproductive and basic health services; (ii) low levels of participation by women in public decision making and the labor market; (iii) the increase in HIV among women; and (iv) the lack of reliable and sex-disaggregated data across all sectors, which hampers evidence-based policy and program interventions. Gender disparities are more prevalent in rural areas and among some ethnic groups.

2. **Education.**\(^2\) Myanmar has reached gender parity in education as girls accounted for 49% of total primary enrollment, 50% of lower secondary enrollment, and 53% of upper secondary enrollment in SY2010/11.\(^3\) However, challenges remain, especially in secondary schools and in technical and vocational education and training. While a slightly larger share of girls (58.6%) than boys (58.3%) age 10–15 is in secondary school, the share of girls not in school (30.5%) is also slightly higher than for boys (29.8%). Girls’ access to education appears to be strongly affected by constraints arising from their social class, ethnicity, and linguistic background, or whether they come from rural or urban locations. Disparities between states are also evident. The lowest ratio of girls to boys in secondary education is in Rakhine (70.0%) and Bago (79.7%) states.\(^4\) Poverty also leads to more female dropouts: for the poorest quintile, the share of girls out of school is 7 percentage points higher than for boys. A slightly higher proportion of girls are also out of school in rural areas. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2009–2010 found that education of the mother is positively linked to children’s school attendance.\(^5\) While education data are limited, some evidence suggests that distance to schools, language of instruction, gender stereotypes and lack of gender-sensitive and locally relevant curricula and teaching methods, and a lack of qualified teachers in remote areas are obstacles to girls and boys attaining an education. In addition, while females outnumber males in post-secondary education, their labor force participation remains low. This indicates a mismatch between the skills attained in school and labor market needs, as well as gender discrimination in the types of study based on cultural stereotypes regarding the skills and/or occupations suitable for women.

3. **Health.** Myanmar has a high maternal mortality ratio (240 deaths per 100,000 live births) and is unlikely to meet the Millennium Development Goal target (footnote 1). Postpartum hemorrhage, eclampsia, and complications from unsafe abortions are the leading causes of maternal deaths, according to the government’s 2006–2011 National Health Plan. Although

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3. Female students comprised about 60% of higher education enrollments in SY2010/11.
abortion is illegal in Myanmar, nearly 10% of all maternal deaths are abortion-related because the procedure is often undertaken by untrained attendants. In addition, there is about a 20% unmet need for contraception among married women, which may also contribute to abortions. In 2010, 78% of births were attended by a skilled birth attendant. However, the figures differ significantly between the poor (69%) and nonpoor (81%) and between rural residents (74%) and urban residents (93%). About 83% of women obtain prenatal care, although access differs between the poor (77%) and nonpoor (86%) and between rural residents (81%) and urban residents (93%) (footnote 5). In Myanmar, 76% of deliveries take place at home, where nearly 90% of maternal deaths occur (footnote 5). A large majority of deaths occur in rural areas, where issues of access, road conditions, poverty, and inadequate health facilities are contributing factors. Myanmar also has a high adolescent fertility rate at 16.9%, mainly because of the lack of sex education. \(^6\) Myanmar has the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS after Thailand in Southeast Asia, and an increasing number of women are contracting HIV. Women’s vulnerability to HIV is increased by the high-risk behavior of their spouses or partners, as well as their inability to negotiate safe sexual practices. Mother-to-child transmission accounts for nearly 3% of new HIV infections. \(^7\) A report on gender and HIV in Myanmar noted several factors that may limit women’s access to HIV services: their lower status in the household, lower literacy rate, less access to health information, and exclusion from decision making on household health action and expenditures, as well as the stigma and fear of being ostracized by the community. \(^8\)

4. **Water and sanitation.** In 2010, 70% of the population had access to safe drinking water. However, access differed between the poor (63%) and non poor (70%) and between rural residents (65%) and urban residents (81%). The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2009–2010 found that only 10.5% of the poorest households had water on their premises and as many as 17.7% spent 15–30 minutes a day collecting water. In 2010, 79% of the population had access to improved sanitation, but with significant differences in access between the poor (72%) and nonpoor (82%) and more moderate differences between rural residents (77%) and urban residents (84%). Women are highly affected by poor access to quality water and sanitation facilities as they are primarily responsible for tasks related to household water and sanitation, taking care of children who become sick from waterborne diseases, and community environment improvements (footnote 5).

5. **Electricity.** Only 26% of the population has access to electricity, with differences in access between the poor and nonpoor and between rural residents and urban residents. Women suffer the most from lack of access to electricity, primarily because of the high economic and health costs associated with using biomass sources of energy. As a result, women need to spend significant amounts of time each day transporting fuel, and cooking often takes longer. Access to electricity frees up women’s time for economic activities that empower them and improve their well-being and quality of life.

6. **Economic empowerment.** Female participation in the labor market (63.1%) is significantly below that of men (85.1%) (footnote 1). The share of women in paid employment outside the agriculture sector gradually increased from 41.3% in 2005 to 44.7% in 2010 (with variations across states and regions). The data reflects women’s limited access to labor markets in the industry and services sectors. A wide gap remains between men and women in the higher ranks of paid employment, with women concentrated in lower ranks and less-skilled jobs.

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Women comprise about half of all staff in state administrative organizations and ministries, but they are concentrated in lower positions. In 2008–2009, women occupied only 31.7% of senior posts (deputy director and above). Despite laws requiring equal pay for men and women, disparities in wages remain. For similar formal sector jobs, men earned an estimated $1,043 in 2007, while women earned only $640.48. Women provide unpaid, largely “invisible” and unrecognized work at home in addition to their paid work in the public sphere. Many women from Myanmar migrate to neighboring countries in search of better-paying jobs. However, most of them end up as less-skilled industrial, agricultural, or domestic workers, often in exploitative workplaces (including those where they are at risk of sexual exploitation).

7. A gender impact study on women’s participation in self-help groups and microfinance found that even women who have had poor or moderate livelihood outcomes have experienced significant gender improvements in areas such as decision making, self-confidence, social capital, and status in families and communities. This shows that capacity building, community mobilization, and affordable credit can significantly increase women’s participation in economic decision making and access to income.

8. **Public decision making.** In Myanmar, only 4% of parliamentary seats are held by women (footnote 1). After the 2010 elections, the proportion of women in the People’s Assembly was 4.3%, in the National Assembly 4.9%, and as regional and state representatives 3.8%. Only 43 women were among the 1,104 elected representatives. These figures are lower than in Cambodia (21.1% in the Lower House), Lao People’s Democratic Republic (25.2%), and Viet Nam (25.8%) (footnote 6).

9. **Gender-based violence.** The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed concern over widespread domestic violence and sexual violence, including rape, which appears to be accompanied by a culture of silence and impunity. Myanmar does not have specific legislation against gender-based violence, although there are penal code provisions against sexual assault and rape. Public awareness of the issue is low. Traditional cultural beliefs, the low social value of women, women’s lack of knowledge about their rights, and insufficient support services (for example, legal, health, counseling, and shelter) collude to ensure that cases are underreported and settled out of court. Human trafficking is another serious challenge. For sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and forced labor, women, children, and men from Myanmar are trafficked to other countries in the region. In 1997, the Government of Myanmar made trafficking a national issue and enacted the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law in 2005. In collaboration with its development partners, the government has taken measures to combat trafficking, including (i) protection and reintegration of trafficked women, (ii) mechanisms to prevent trafficking of women, and (iii) establishment of collaboration and coordination among ministries to uncover trafficking cases and take legal action against perpetrators.

10. **Institutional assessment.** Myanmar’s national machinery for the promotion of gender equity includes the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Rehabilitation, with the Department of Social Welfare as the focal point for gender issues; the Myanmar National Committee for

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Women’s Affairs; and the Myanmar Women’s Affairs Federation (MWAF). Formed in 2003, the MWAF organizes women all over the country to carry out activities to promote security and advancement of women. It has networks at different levels of administration from the state or division down to the district and township. MWAF is a government-organized nongovernment organization, but it operates under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Rehabilitation and is funded and staffed by the government. MWAF implements a national plan of action based on the Beijing Platform of Action. However, these agencies lack the capacity, resources, and institutional support to carry out their mandate. In addition, institutional capacity is limited in key line ministries with regard to mainstreaming gender in national policies, plans, and programs. Thus, these ministries require additional support to address priority commitments for gender equality, including maternal mortality, sexual and reproductive health, and poverty reduction.

11. Myanmar is signatory to a number of international conventions relevant to gender and development, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Protocol to Combat the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air.

12. **ADB gender strategy.** ADB will pursue gender equality in Myanmar by incorporating gender analysis in all key policy reviews and sector strategies and plans, and supporting female access to skills development, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, assets, resources, and decision making. Project-specific gender action plans with gender design features, targets, and indicators will promote women’s participation and access to benefits across ADB operations in Myanmar.