# Not Enough Time: Insight Into Myanmar Women's Urban Experiences

## City Life Survey Discussion Paper

Caitlin Williscroft

The Asia Foundation

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# FOREWORD

In 2018 The Asia Foundation, in partnership with the Yangon School of Political Science, rolled out the City Life Survey (CLS) following a successful pilot in 2017.  This multi-year, multi-city, public perception survey is a tool to understand the changes happening in Myanmar cities and the impact of these changes on people's sense of well-being.

Drastically varying levels of economic, social and political change in Myanmar has made it challenging for even the most attentive observers to track what's changing, what remains the same, how this varies across different groups, and what the implications of this all are for society and the economy. This challenge is compounded by two factors. The first is the more traditional lack of reliable comparative and longitudinal data on the diverse experiences of urban residents. The second is the rapid rise in prominence of social media as a source of information for urban leaders. While it is increasing government officials' exposure to the direct views of residents the information being exchanged on these platforms is biased in ways that, across the world, we are only just starting to understand.

The CLS is a tool to measure the many different aspects of urban living that influence the well-being of residents across five of Myanmar's largest cities, based on the latest scientific research. Well-being as a concept is broad and multi-dimensional and has no literal translation into Burmese. At its simplest, well-being is about what it means to live a good life and the CLS is designed to capture those aspects of urban life that are most important to this. The 2018 Summary Report contains headline findings, a framework for thinking about well-being, and details on the full methodology. Yet with 135 questions asked of 2,414 people from five cities, the Summary Report only represents a snapshot of the analysis that is possible from the rich CLS dataset.

To address this gap, The Asia Foundation invited research experts to take a deeper dive into the 2018 CLS, to contextualize and triangulate its findings against other sources of evidence. The three Discussion Papers apply the research experts' distinct skills, knowledge and experiences to important urban issues they have identified through their analysis. Although all Discussion Papers follow the same structure, the voice and style of the author remains.

This Discussion Paper Series focuses on three core areas of interest; gender, migration and the social contract. *Urban Migration in Myanmar: An Analysis of Migration Patterns and Migrant Well-being* discusses urban migration patterns, the characteristics of recent migrants and how they experience urban governance. *Public Finances and the Social Contract in Myanmar: Reflections from the City Life* Survey takes a more conceptual approach and looks at what theory and data can tell us about social cohesion and state-society relationships in an increasingly urbanized Myanmar. *Not Enough Time: Insight into Myanmar Women's Urban Experiences* explores prevailing social norms and presents the first robust data in Myanmar on the widely experienced phenomenon of the 'triple burden' and considers the implications for women's opportunities in cities.

These papers are intended to prompt discussion and will in places challenge some prevailing views. They aren't considered the last word on these topics, and readers are invited to join The Asia Foundation's wider efforts to contextualize these findings and to help make them relevant to Myanmar's urban leaders. We hope that these papers and further initiatives provide valuable evidence to those working to make Myanmar's cities better places to live and work and in particular to provide insight into more traditionally marginalized groups, such as women and migrants.

The views presented in these papers are of the authors and do not represent the views of The Asia Foundation.

**Matthew Arnold**
Country Representative, The Asia Foundation
Yangon, January 2020

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# KEY TERMS

**Agency and Influence**

The ability of women to access opportunities, exert their presence, engage with decision-makers, and substantively take part in and influence public processes and outcomes. Agency and influence refers to more than just the numeric inclusion of women and is often referred to as "meaningful participation".

**Development Affairs Organizations (DAOs)**

The municipal authorities of Myanmar. DAOs are responsible for the collection of fees and taxes, business licensing, and the delivery of key urban services such as roads, water and garbage collection. In Myanmar's three largest cities (Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyidaw) these are referred to as City Development Committees (CDCs) such as YCDC, MCDC and NCDC.

**Gender**

The socially and politically constructed roles, behaviors and attributes that a society considers appropriate, acceptable, and valued for girls, boys, women, and men. Gender is a complex system of power that shapes the lives, opportunities, rights, relationships, and access to resources for girls, boys, women, and men.[1] Gender differences and the understanding of masculine and feminine is not universal but rather it is culturally specific and strongly influenced by other factors such as ethnicity, religion, age, and class.[2]

**Gender Equality**

The fairness of the treatment of girls, boys, women, and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment that is different, but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities.[3]

**Triple Burden**

The triple role of women in society split into three distinct types of work: reproductive (domestic work, such as child caring and rearing, caring for the sick and elderly, and household chores such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, gathering water etc., fuel related work, health related work); productive (work for the purpose of income and daily subsistence, including formal employment, work in the informal sector, and self-employment); and community (community activities that are often voluntary). The triple burden is seen to be a barrier for women with regards to economic empowerment.

**Youth**

A group of people that fall between the ages of 18 and 35 as defined by Myanmar's National Youth Policy.

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| **ANOVA** | Analysis of Variance |
| **CEDAW** | Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women |
| **CLS** | City Life Survey |
| **CDC** | City Development Committee |
| **DAO** | Development Affairs Organization |
| **GBV** | Gender-based violence |
| **GEN** | Gender Equality Network |
| **MCDC** | Mandalay City Development Committee |
| **MP** | Member of Parliament |
| **SDG** | Sustainable Development Goal |
| **YCDC** | Yangon City Development Committee |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Myanmar is undergoing a period of significant change both economically and socially. From a cultural perspective the country's recent democratization and rapid urbanization has created new challenges and realities to traditional customs and ideas. Despite change, gender inequality remains and in some instances is exacerbated by rapid urbanization which doesn't take into consideration the responsibilities of women and the expectations placed upon them. Women's inclusion in the public and political spheres is limited and rarely substantive.

## Women are starting to gain more financial independence than in the past, though increase in finances does not necessarily translate into gains in equality.

Traditional perceptions of gender roles in Myanmar have placed the women's sphere of influence firmly in the home. Decisions deemed "important" by society have been considered appropriate for men. As the social fabric of the country starts to change, conventional ways of viewing gender relations will undoubtedly shift in ways that are both supportive and potentially detrimental to equality. For example, women are starting to gain more financial independence than in the past, though increase in finances does not necessarily translate into gains in equality.

This Discussion Paper will examine the 2018 City Life Survey (CLS) data through a gender lens focusing on three key topics: the triple burden, agency and influence, and employment. The paper will analyze how the 2018 CLS data challenges or complements other research on gender issues in Myanmar, highlighting the ways in which the triple burden limits gender equality and participation in public life and the ways in which city infrastructure for example could address such barriers.

**THE 2018 *CITY LIFE* SURVEY CITIES**
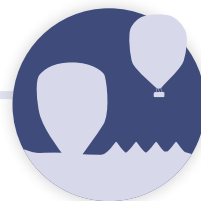


Yangon   Mandalay   Mawlamyine   Monywa   Taunggyi

# BACKGROUND

Approximately 15 million people out of Myanmar's population of 51.48 million—or three out of 10 people—live in cities.[4] Current estimates project that 50 percent of Myanmar's population will call cities home by 2040.[5] The way people experience city life, however, is not homogenous. Multiple markers of identity, such as gender, age, ethnicity, and religion, shape an individual's everyday experience in a city, from their daily household chores, commute, and perception of safety, to how they interact with city officials. The collision of different communities in cities offers an opportunity to challenge dominant narratives, views, and beliefs. Cities are a window into understanding changing—or unchanging—norms around gender equality and inequality.

The purpose of this Discussion Paper to explore and understand the different experiences and perspectives of men and women in cities. This will be done through the analysis of the data using a 'gender lens'. The concept and practice of applying a 'gender lens' means examining the complex relationships between men and women, including the barriers and opportunities that women and men experience related to access to resources, decision-making, and rights.[6] By disaggregating the 2018 CLS by gender, this paper seeks to understand what patterns and trends the 2018 CLS reveals with regards to gender and the barriers to equality in Myanmar's cities.

This Discussion Paper begins by setting out why gender matters in cities. Next, the paper turns to analyzing the 2018 CLS data against three topics: the triple burden, agency and influence, and employment. In this section, the analysis focuses on looking at how the 2018 CLS data either confirms or challenges existing research and analysis on gender issues in Myanmar. Finally, the Discussion Paper offers an overview of key findings. This paper provides an example on how to use gender disaggregated data for the purpose of understanding different urban perspectives and experiences of men and women.



**15 MILLION** PEOPLE LIVE IN CITIES

**BY 2040**
**50% OF MYANMAR'S POPULATION WILL LIVE IN CITIES**

## WHY THESE THREE AREAS?

This Discussion Paper does not offer an exhaustive gender analysis of all the data generated by the 2018 CLS. Instead, the report focuses on what the 2018 CLS data reveals about three areas related to gender equality: the triple burden, agency and influence, and employment.

The triple burden is globally considered a hurdle to gender equality because it limits the time and space that women have to enter and meaningfully participate in or influence public-decision making. Furthermore, one key component of the triple burden; women's domestic labor, is under-valued despite its daily role in the regeneration of labor and not seen as a vital contributing factor to the economy which in turn reinforces the lower status of women vis-à-vis men. Agency and influence refer to the ability of women to access opportunities, exert their presence, engage with decision-makers, and substantively take part in and influence public processes and outcomes. This is a marker of gender equality because the absence of women or the tokenistic inclusion of women is rooted in deep structural norms that uphold men as decision-makers, excluding women from a range of opportunities to participate in public life. The domestic burden described is a barrier to women's ability to participate in the formal economy, meaning that women participate in lower numbers in the labor force and often do not exercise full control or autonomy over financial resources in the household when they generate income.
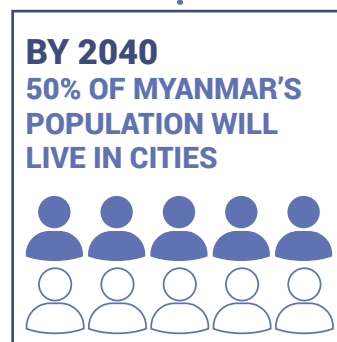
## BOX 1:
## ABOUT THE CITY LIFE SURVEY

The 2018 CLS is an initiative to understand the well-being of urban residents living in five cities across Myanmar; Yangon, Mandalay, Mawlamyine, Monywa, and Taunggyi. The CLS has three key goals:

1. Providing policymakers with the information they need to make informed decisions
2. Helping policymakers understand the priorities of their communities
3. Facilitating lesson learning and healthy competition between cities

The survey itself includes 135 questions covering all aspects of urban life. Questions can be roughly divided into the categories of economic, physical, and inter-personal well-being. Questions were selected to either capture holistic determinants of well-being, or to meet the specific needs of municipal authorities. The survey itself was conducted in 2018 in collaboration with the Yangon School of Political Science, and is intended to be repeated every two years alongside parallel programs and products such as city-level briefings, the development of a public data portal, data analysis training workshops, and thematic Discussion Papers such as this one.



The idea of "positive deviance" as an approach to policy reform is a key part of CLS's theoretical framework. A positive deviance model identifies places where conditions are unusually good or systems are unusually effective, and then explores why that place is more successful than its peers – and whether their strategy or solution could be learned from and replicated elsewhere. Cities can be thought of as laboratories, and their wide diversity of practice means it is possible to compare the efficacy of different approaches, learn from successes and failures, and improve well-being in all cities as a result.

The CLS utilized three-stage randomization (by ward, household, and respondent) and was conducted by trained face-to-face interviewers who input responses into e-tablets. There were 2,414 respondents in five cities, 27 townships, and 228 wards, all of which are residents of Myanmar over the age of 18. Four religious groups and 48 ethnic groups are represented. For the full methodology please read the 'City Life Survey 2018 Summary Report'.

All of the data points presented in this Discussion Paper have been weighted by city and by gender to better reflect the true population proportions. All differences between women and men referenced in the Discussion Paper have passed a test of statistical significance with a confidence interval of 95 percent.[7] Difference of proportion analysis was completed with two-proportion t-tests, and difference of means analysis was completed with one-way ANOVA tests. All analyses were completed in R.

# WHY GENDER MATTERS IN CITIES

The needs, rights, everyday lived realities, and perspectives of women and girls is vital to building safe and inclusive cities. Global evidence attests that gender equality and improving the rights of women and girls is vital for achieving sustainable and inclusive development. Women's participation is particularly important in transitional countries, like Myanmar, as evidence points to a correlation between women's participation in peacebuilding and the sustainability of peace agreements.[8] This tallies with a much larger body of evidence that points to the correlation between the increasing participation of women in public-decision making and the adoption of gender inclusive policies and laws.[9] In other words: when more women are involved in political and public decision-making this leads to advances in gender inclusive policies and legal change.[10] In the context of cities, this means that women are more likely be concerned about inclusive and responsive urban governance.

Importantly, the evidence base on women's influence in public decision-making also emphasizes that the numerical inclusion of women in public office does not automatically translate into gender equality gains. Singular interventions, such as quotas, rarely work in insolation as there is a steep incline for women to access opportunities to engage in public life. Evidence points to the importance of putting measures in place to build an enabling environment for women's participation.[11] These measures include; building the capacity and confidence of women (through mentorship, training, women's networks etc.), reducing the burden of household tasks (e.g. domestic chores, caring for children), and addressing GBV, among others.[12]

**The evidence base on women's influence in public decision-making also emphasizes that the numerical inclusion of women in public office does not automatically translate into gender equality gains.**

The importance of the role of gender and cities is reflected in international norms and standards. SDG 11 seeks to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable".[13] The significance of gender equality is codified in international standards and norms, such as the CEDAW, which Myanmar acceded in 1997, and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995).

Given the global acceleration in urbanization[14] and emerging evidence that suggests that social change occurs fasters in cities[15] and that cities may offer fertile ground for transforming gender inequalities. In fact, some research shows that support for gender equality is greater in cities.[16] Cities enable the collision and convergence of people from different backgrounds and experiences, meaning traditional notions of gender equality can be challenged. Views around gender norms and ideologies can become more flexible.[17] Urbanization is often also linked to the expansion of opportunities for women, particularly when compared to their rural counterparts.[18] In Cambodia, for example, research shows that the high-cost of urban life has spurred interest in a more gender equitable division of labor and that increased exposure and association—inherent in the fabric of cities—enables collective rethinking of gender relations.[19]

At the same time, cities pose unique challenges for women and are not automatically a

# Deficiencies in health and education services in cities create challenges for women because of their role in childcaring and rearing.

solution for improving gender equality or a magic bullet for transforming social inequalities. Opportunities to reverse prevailing gender norms in cities are often hampered by gender specific urban challenges that women face.[20] Challenges include personal security, which is particularly problematic in densely populated areas with limited infrastructure, such as street lights and safe transportation options. Whether insecurity is real or perceived, it often leads women to self-restrict their movements or provides a justification for family members to closely monitor the movement of women and girls (even though monitoring, or in some cases 'policing,' is rooted in socio-cultural norms). Some studies show that GBV is exacerbated in cities by urban poverty, poor living conditions and fragmented social relations.[21]

Deficiencies in health and education services in cities create challenges for women because of their role in childcaring and rearing. The absence of services pulls women into spending more time on navigating fractured social security systems or taking on a larger share of the care burden, particularly in the absence of comprehensive, accessible, and reliable healthcare systems.

Public transport also affects women—who use public transport in larger numbers than men—as security and harassment issues tend to inhibit women from confidently and safely accessing public spaces.[22] The combination of safety concerns and limited reach of public transportation in developing countries reduces the probability of women participating in the formal labor market. In fact, evidence indicates that the greatest barrier to women's participation in the labor market is the limited access to and safety of transportation in developing countries.[23]

Given the unique challenges that women face in cities, inclusive city planning that responds to the needs of men, women, boys and girls is vital.[24] City design (intentional and otherwise) can further exacerbate the time burden women experience,[25] an issue that is heightened for women reliant on city infrastructure to take children to school, shop for groceries, accompany family members to the doctor, etc. Having gender disaggregated data is therefore an important starting point to inform the creation of gender responsive urban policies: public policies that bring the needs of men and women to the fore. To increase the prospects for inclusive urbanization, a sharp focus on understanding gender relations and dynamics in cities is needed, particularly given the lack of clarity in the evidence-base on whether cities improve the substantive equality between men, women, boys and girls. This Discussion Paper, therefore, seeks to make a contribution to understanding the gender dimensions of Myanmar's cities using the 2018 CLS data-set.

# WHAT DOES THE 2018 CLS TELL US ABOUT GENDER IN MYANMAR'S CITIES?
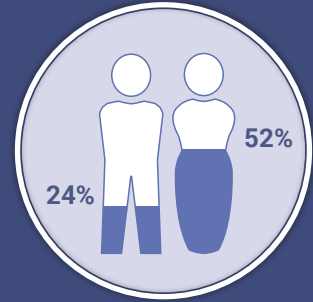
## KEY FINDINGS

**1**

**WOMEN RESPONDENTS SPEND DOUBLE THE AMOUNT OF TIME ON CHILDCARE THAN MEN**

**2**

**MEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO TALK TO WARD ADMINISTRATORS THAN WOMEN**

**3**

24%

52%

24% MEN + 52% WOMEN **ARE NOT EMPLOYED & NOT LOOKING FOR WORK**

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

women have less time to participate in public life, **inclusion strategies are needed** to overcome this barrier to equality

**inclusive public engagement needed** to target women if they are not entering the public sphere

**improving city infrastructure** (like public transportation) can improve women's participation in the workforce

# GENDER AND THE 2018 CITY LIFE SURVEY

This section provides an overview of how the 2018 CLS data either supports or challenges three key thematic areas related to gender equality: the triple burden, women's agency and influence, and employment. For each thematic area, an overview of the issue in the Myanmar context is provided, followed by an analysis and discussion of what the 2018 CLS data tells us about each area.
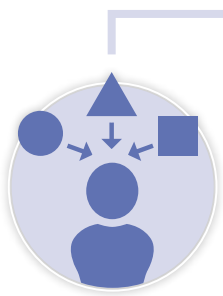
## THE TRIPLE BURDEN

A well-documented barrier to gender equality in Myanmar and globally is the triple burden. The triple burden (or sometimes called the triple role) describes three distinct types of work that women are expected to undertake: reproductive, productive and community. This section focuses on one key element of the triple burden: the household labor that women take on in the private sphere that is linked to reproduction. This refers to a range of domestic work, including childcaring and rearing, caring for the sick and elderly, and household chores such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, gathering water, etc.

In Myanmar, the reproductive burden ascribed to women through socio-cultural norms has not decreased despite the increase in women engaging in income generation in the formal economy.[26] The overwhelming majority of domestic labor is unremunerated, meaning that it is not valued equally with contributions to the formal economy despite its crucial role in the daily maintenance of the productive economy. In Myanmar, women continue to take on a disproportionate number of responsibilities in the domestic sphere compared to male household members.[27] Often referred to as 'time poverty', domestic labor inhibits the time, space, and ability that women have to participate the public sphere, often precluding them from public and political life.[28]

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**BOX 2:**
**CLS QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE TRIPLE BURDEN:**

Question 13: On a typical week day how many hours do you spend doing the following activities?

- Work that contributes to household income (e.g. paid job or preparing goods to sell at the market)
- Household chores (including shopping for the household)
- Childcare/care for elderly person
- Leisure
- Sleep
- Volunteering
- Traveling from one place to another

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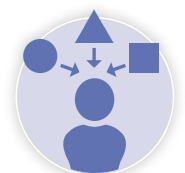
Data in the 2018 CLS enables quantification of the prevalence of the domestic household burden in the context of Myanmar cities for the first time. Previously, these domestic responsibilities have only been described from a qualitative angle in Myanmar. Therefore, the 2018 CLS data offers fresh insights to quantify the magnitude of this everyday barrier to gender equality.[29]

The CLS 2018 data shows that women respondents reported spending double the amount of time on childcare, care for the elderly and household chores than men. In other words: women spend five hours and men spend two and a half hours a day on domestic labor. The amount of hours per day recorded in the 2018 CLS closely mirrors global estimates where men do one-half to less than one-fifth of unpaid care work than women.[30] From the 2018 CLS data, income quintile, city, and dual earner status of a household do not appear to significantly influence the number of hours men and women spend on child care and household chores. This means that women from higher and lower socio-economic classes alike take on the overwhelming majority of household responsibilities and tasks.

The 2018 CLS data shows that women respondents with children spend more time on caregiving and chores than women who do not have children. In fact, women respondents with children report spending 5.7 hours per day on childcare and domestic tasks whereas women without children report on average 3.9 hours a day on these responsibilities. In contrast, the 2018 CLS data shows that men with children report spending 2.7 hours on household chores per day whereas men without children reported spending 2.1 hours per day. The difference between the number of hours that women with children (5.7 hours) and men with children (2.7 hours) spend provides data to support qualitative analysis of socio-cultural norms that show that childcare remains a feminized responsibility across Myanmar. While the 2018 CLS did not extend to rural areas, meaning that an urban-rural comparison is not possible, data on household chores in surveyed cities demonstrates that domestic responsibilities are unequally shared between men and women. This means that the fabric of cities does not necessarily shift gender relations as the 2018 CLS data shows that socio-cultural norms continue to inform the gendered division of labor that places domestic responsibilities on women.

When adding an age variable to analysis, data shows that young women respondents spend double the number of hours on care and chores combined than their male youth cohort.[31] Therefore, from a young age, women and girls are expected to take on domestic responsibilities, limiting the amount of time they would have to otherwise apply in areas such as employment outside the home or in education. Overall, data from the 2018 CLS confirms qualitative research in Myanmar that the domestic burden is a significant barrier to achieving substantive equality between men and women. The 2018 CLS data shows that gender inequality starts at a young age and consolidates over time when women have children.

While further research is needed to understand the differences in the domestic burden in urban versus rural areas, the 2018 CLS data reveals that in the five cities surveyed the sharing of household work is far from equally distributed between men and women. As evidence attests, alleviating the domestic burden is critical for creating an enabling environment for women's meaningful participation in public life.[32] It is important for a range of stakeholders (government, development partners, civil society, etc.) to implement practical mechanisms and support attitudinal change to overcome this everyday barrier to equality.

In the context of cities, understanding the time women spend on household responsibilities on a daily basis can help ensure that city infrastructure, planning, and services does not contribute to reinforcing or exacerbating women's domestic burden. For example, limited accessibility to transportation networks can increase the number of hours women spend on daily domestic tasks such as picking up children from school or food shopping. Similarly, inadequate or costly health services in cities can increase the number of hours women spend on caring for the sick within a family. Paying attention to the different needs of men and women is therefore critical to ensure that cities do not contribute to pre-existing forms of inequalities.

**Understanding the time women spend on household responsibilities on a daily basis can help ensure that city infrastructure, planning, and services does not contribute to reinforcing or exacerbating women's domestic burden.**
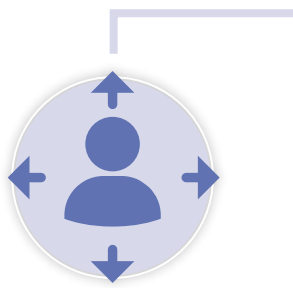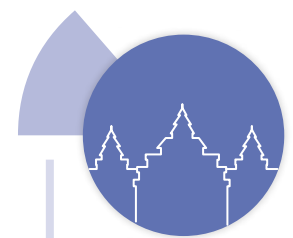
## AGENCY AND INFLUENCE

Across all levels of governance in Myanmar, data shows that women participate in significantly lower numbers than men. In politics, for example, there are low levels of women's inclusion: 13.7 percent of elected parliamentarians (or 10.5 percent of parliamentarians when including MPs appointed by the military Tatmadaw) are women.[33] Myanmar has zero women township administrators, and only 17 out of 15,972 (0.1 percent) of village tract administrators are women.[34]

The limited substantive participation of women in the public sphere is rooted in complex socio-cultural norms that exist across all ethnic and religious groups in the country. Across Asia, systems of patriarchy prevent women from substantively participating in public decision-making and political life.[35] Successive political eras in Myanmar have portrayed women as 'autonomous' agents in public life by invoking a narrative of women's 'high status'.[36] Women have made very few substantive gains from this narrative, as evidenced by the data above, as major deficits in gender equality remain across the country.[37] The 'high status' of women narrative mainly focuses on the experiences of elite women, obscuring and marginalizing the real, everyday realities of women across Myanmar. Masculine leadership cultures continue; in fact, one study found over 70 percent of men and women surveyed believe that men make better political leaders and business executives.[38]

While the 2018 CLS does not offer data around women's inclusion rates in urban governance in the five cities surveyed, it asks important questions about how residents engage with and seek to influence urban decision-makers and administrators. Given that there is a well-documented correlation between women in political and public life and, gender sensitive policies and legal change, understanding if and how women influence, engage and become decision-makers is vital for understanding gender equality in Myanmar's cities.

**13.7 %**
**OF ELECTED PARLIAMENTARIANS ARE WOMEN**

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### BOX 3:
### CLS QUESTIONS RELATED TO AGENCY AND INFLUENCE

• Question 66b.: I feel that my MP representative in the State/Region Hluttaw represents the interests of my household.

• Question 68: What is the best way that someone like you could influence decisions made by [YCDC/DAO]?

• Question 69: Which of these have you used?
  ○ None
  ○ Talk to DAO/YCDC/MCDC staff
  ○ Write a letter to the DAO/YCDC/MCDC
  ○ Make a donation to the DAO/YCDC/MCDC;
  ○ Write a comment on the DAO/YCDC/MCDC Facebook page/group
  ○ Talk to my ward administrator
  ○ Talk to a community elder
  ○ Talk to my MP
  ○ Talk to a middle man
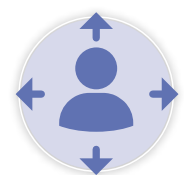
# Urban decision-makers need to consider, in their outreach activities, the limited time availability of women due to their domestic responsibilities to participate in the public sphere.

The 2018 CLS data shows that there is little disparity in how male- and female- headed households perceive MPs to represent their interests. Female-headed households are approximately three percentage points less likely than male headed households to agree that their MP represents their household interests. This minimal disparity stands in contrast to CLS 2018 data that shows that women are more likely to have never tried to engage with or influence government decisions: women are eight percentage points more likely than men to not know who their MP is, and approximately two percentage points less likely than men to have contacted their MP to help solve a problem.

When women do engage with local officials, they are most likely to talk to their ward administrator, although data shows that men talk to their ward administrators still in higher numbers than women. Women are more likely to say that talking or writing to the DAO is the most effective way to influence decisions made by the YCDC. Women are five percentage points more likely to talk to a community elder than men when seeking to influence decisions. This is important to consider as the majority of community elders are men, meaning that when women approach community elders, it could be subtly reinforcing the socio-cultural norms and narratives around male leadership and decision-making. Men are more likely than women to have completed the list of actions (see text box above) identified by the 2018 CLS to influence decisions made by the YCDC. These findings are significant as they could demonstrate that socio-cultural norms surrounding political life being the domain of men remain salient in the context of Myanmar's cities.

Indicative data analysis shows that men are more likely to say that contacting a ward administrator directly is the best way to influence decisions. Women are more likely to say that writing or talking to a DAO is the most effective way to influence decisions. While more research is needed to understand the differences in how men and women seek to influence urban governance, this data could mean that women are more likely to pursue traditional routes—writing letters and communicating through community elders (as discussed above)—meaning that women are not necessarily exerting their presence and agency in the public sphere to engage with local officials. This could be explained by the resilience of gendered notions of leadership and power in Myanmar. This preference could also be in part due to the disproportionate burden that women carry in the area of childcare and household tasks, which limits the ability of women to leave the domestic sphere and enter the public domain to engage with and influence decision-makers. Alternatively, women may lack social capital and requisite networks to access ward administrators directly, particularly as access and influence is often predicated on pre-existing personal relationships and trust, which women may lack because of socio-cultural norms that place them in the private sphere.

In the context of cities, understanding the different ways that men and women seek to engage, influence and access urban decision-makers and administrators provides a starting point to move towards gender sensitive public engagement strategies. For example, the use of gender blind strategies that overlook the needs of women and how they access information may reinforce rather than transform norms around male leadership. Furthermore, urban decision-makers need to consider, in their outreach activities, the limited time availability of women due to their domestic responsibilities to participate in the public sphere.

## EMPLOYMENT

Employment is a key dimension of understanding gender equality. The barriers to women's full and equal participation in the economy has been well-documented in the Myanmar context.[39] Structural inequalities in formal employment manifest in higher employment rates for men and lower employment rates for women. Socio-cultural norms lead to a gender division of labor where women are responsible for unpaid work linked to reproduction.[40] Domestic duties limit the time and ability of women to enter formal employment, meaning that they rarely ascend to senior leadership and decision-making roles in the private sector as these roles are usually reserved for older men.

Socio-cultural norms also manifest in the feminization of certain professions, such as nurses and teachers. While women dominate the education sector as teachers and university professors, they rarely hold senior management roles within educational institutions as men are considered 'natural leaders'.[41] Women are also more likely be employed in the informal sector or self-employed as it offers flexibility and autonomy to generate income while continuing daily household tasks. While self-employment is an attractive option for many women, it also brings less security, stability, and less predictable income flows. In addition to the mentioned challenges, harassment, including sexual harassment, is an issue in workplaces across Myanmar.[42]

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**BOX 4:**
**CLS QUESTIONS RELATING TO EMPLOYMENT**

Question 8: How do you currently work?

- Daily labor
- Part time*
- Full time
- No, I don't work
- No I don't work but am looking for a job
- Prefer not to say

*Part time is defined as working less than a full five days of work a week.

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The 2018 CLS asked respondents "How do you currently work?" In response to this question, 24 percent of men and 52 percent of women report they are not working and not looking for work. This means that more than double the number of women surveyed are not employed, supporting qualitative research that demonstrates that women take on the bulk of tasks in the domestic sphere.

The 2018 CLS data reveals important age trends. Three times the number of young women report that they do not work compared to their male youth cohort.[43] The largest disparity in employment rates is in the 35-50 age range bracket: 8.5 percent of men and 40 percent of women report they were not employed. The 40 percent rate amongst women aged 35-50 corresponds with the bulk of a women's child rearing and caring years. When adding age into analysis, data shows that inequality in employment starts at a young age and increases over time as women assume childcare responsibilities during their child bearing years. Addressing the structural causes of inequalities in employment is vital given that gender differences in employment increase with time as women are ascribed with more household responsibilities associated with childcare.

# NOT WORKING + NOT LOOKING FOR WORK

Female

Male

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **OVERALL** | **52%** | **24%** |
| **35-50 YEAR OLDS** | **40%** | **8.5%** |
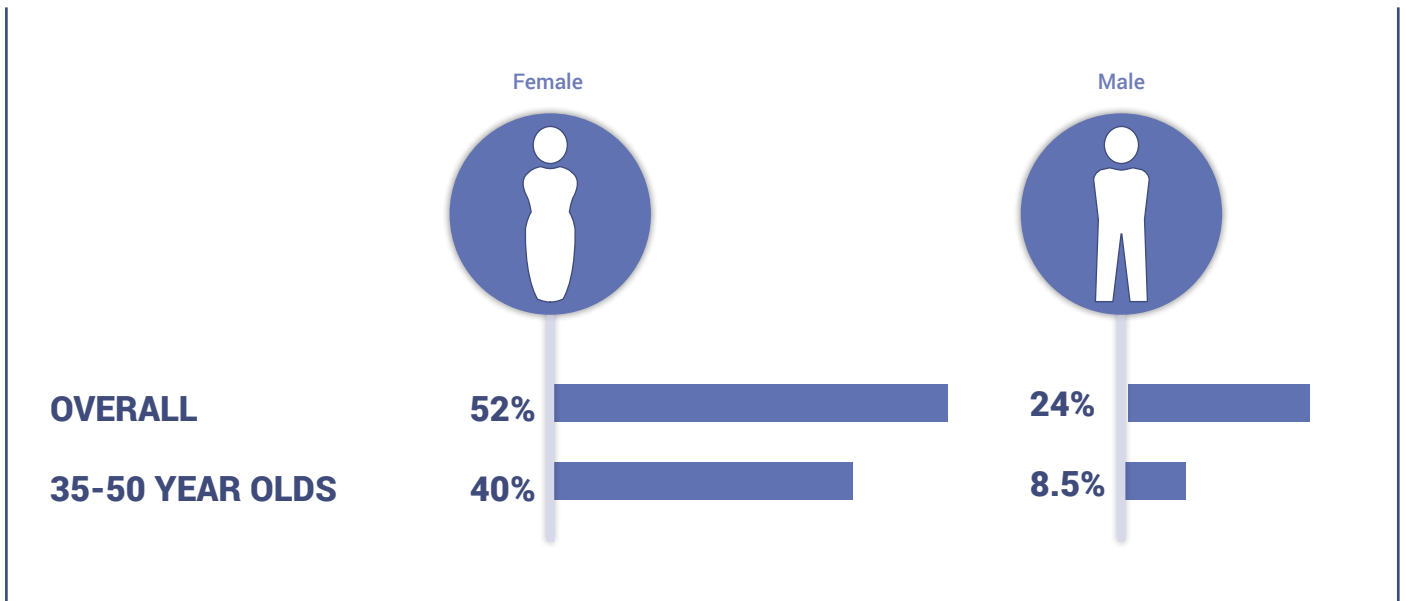
The 2018 CLS data confirms other data in Myanmar which points to inequalities in the labor force. The 2014 census data shows that 51 percent of women aged from 15 to 64 are in the workforce, compared to 85 percent of men.[44] Differences in the employment status between men and women are important to consider as urbanization brings opportunities to address inequalities in employment, but can also consolidate pre-existing inequalities if gender is overlooked. For example, long and unsafe commutes are documented as a barrier to women entering employment.[45] This means that gender blind or poorly designed city infrastructure can reinforce pre-existing barriers to women's participation in the labor force. The reported lower numbers of employed women in cities surveyed could indicate a need to improve accessibility and reach of transportation infrastructure, though more in-depth research is needed to verify if poor public transportation in Myanmar is a contributing factor to inequality in labor force participation.

The 2018 CLS data shows that 77 percent of women respondents reported that they are self-employed compared to 63 percent of men. Self-employment is an attractive option for women in Myanmar given the time burden of domestic work (as discussed above). While self-employment is a common type of work for men and women, lack of regulation and unpredictable income flows can increase susceptibility to economic shocks. Self-employment also often lacks comprehensive benefits, which has a gendered impact that is particularly heightened during child bearing and caring years. This trend in self-employment of women surveyed revealed by the 2018 CLS data is important to understand as Myanmar's economic transition continues, there are opportunities for cities to improve labor standards and conditions around self-employment that respond to the needs of both men and women.

Some research highlights that the higher cost of living in cities is an impetus in itself for women to enter the workforce in greater numbers, contributing to the levelling out of the numbers of men and women in the formal economy.[46] Further research is needed as it is not yet clear if this trend is occurring in Myanmar's cities. Research is also needed to understand who controls resources and finances in dual-earner households.

**SELF-EMPLOYED**

**77 %**

**63%**
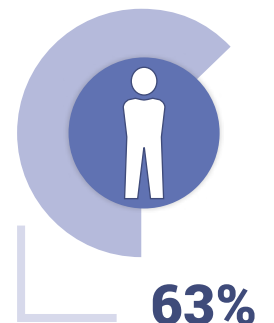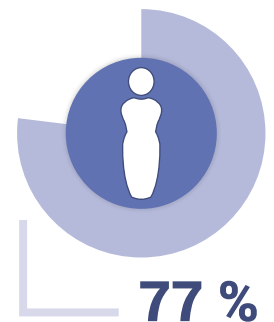
For example, if women, over time, participate in greater numbers in the formal labor market, but do not have agency or control over the allocation of their income within a household, then gender equality is improving on the surface, but not necessarily at the structural level. This is problematic as evidence shows that addressing the structural causes of inequality is required for transformation.

**BOX 5:**
**CLS DATA ON PERSONAL SAFETY IN CITIES**

CLS question 33: I feel safe walking alone in my neighborhood after dark

A host of socio-cultural norms impact how men, women, boys and girls perceive and experience safety and security in cities. The lack of safety—whether real or perceived—in cities is informed by socio-cultural norms. These norms often seek to dissuade women and girls from going out at night, particularly alone, as their vulnerability is viewed as being heightened. Furthermore, socio-cultural norms shape how 'good women' behave, reducing the status of those go out at night and break conformity with boundaries that place them in the household.[47] For example, a respondent in a research project conducted by GEN stated "it is our culture that we are very much worried that something bad can happen to girls if they go out at night".[48] Norms around masculinity also encourage men to 'protect' or monitor women and girls, meaning that male relatives often discourage, or at times prevent, women from going out at night. These socio-cultural norms around safety of women at night significantly inhibit the ability of women to participate in public life, especially if travel at night within or between cities is required.[49]

" **It is our culture that we are very much worried that something bad can happen to girls if they go out at night.** "

2018 CLS data states that 88 percent of men and 87 percent of women report that they feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood after dark. Women respondents between the ages of 18-35 were most likely to strongly disagree with the statement that they feel safe at night. 2018 CLS findings challenge existing research on this issue in Myanmar and prevailing socio-cultural norms that seek to inhibit women from travelling alone at night. Further research is needed to triangulate the 2018 CLS data to ascertain whether feeling safe at night is indeed providing an indication of softening norms around women's travel at night or increasing women's agency, or whether women's responses have already built in risk mitigation strategies such as ensuring that they do not walk home alone at night, or that they return home earlier.

# CONCLUSION

Disaggregating a pre-existing data set by gender provides significant opportunity to analyze gender patterns and trends across a range of sectors, as demonstrated by this Discussion Paper. This paper has focused on three critical dimensions of women's urban experience. The analysis and the findings that this paper present serve the claim that women in urban Myanmar are losing opportunities due to their time constraints. This widely observed phenomena now has rigorous quantitative data to support it. They lack the same access to decision makers and have reduced access to the formal labor market.

The 2018 CLS contains vast amounts of data that can be disaggregated by gender and interpreted through a gender lens. Broader and deeper gender analysis is more possible than the scope of this paper allows. This data can inform the necessary longer-term discussions on gender equity within the context of Myanmar's cities.

# KEY FINDINGS IN THIS GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE 2018 CLS INCLUDE:

## THE TRIPLE BURDEN
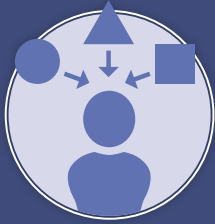


- Women respondents spend double the amount of time on childcare, care for the elderly and household chores than men. When adding an age variable to analysis, data shows that young women respondents spend double the number of hours on care and chores combined compared to their male youth counterparts.
- The 'triple burden' significantly impedes the time and availability of women—across all cities, ethnic groups, religions, ages, educational backgrounds, and income quintiles—to participate in public life.

## AGENCY AND INFLUENCE

- Men talk to their ward administrators in greater numbers than women.



- Women are more likely to use traditional routes, such as letter writing or communicating with a community elder (who are usually men), to influence urban decision-making. These methods have the potential to minimize the presence of women in the public sphere and reinforce gendered leadership cultures.
- Understanding how women interact in public spaces and seek to influence public-decision-makers, directly or indirectly, creates an opportunity to build inclusive public engagement strategies that can target women more effectively.

## EMPLOYMENT

- 24 percent of men and 52 percent of women report they are not employed and not looking for employment in the cities surveyed.



- The largest disparity in employment rates was reported in the 35 to 50 age range bracket (8.5 percent of men and 40 percent of women reported they were not employed).
- Equality in the labor force remains a critical barrier to equality in Myanmar cities, particularly as women's informal labor that upholds the formal economy remains undervalued.
- City infrastructure, particularly public transportation, plays a critical role in enhancing women's participation of in the labor force. The reported lower numbers of employed women in cities surveyed could indicate a need to improve accessibility and reach of transportation infrastructure.

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