

# Survey of Myanmar Members of Parliament: Reflections from the First Hluttaw





*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

Inside Front Cover

**Survey of Myanmar**  
**Members of Parliament: Reflections from the First Hluttaw**

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## ACRONYM

<b>AMRDP</b>	All Mon Region Democracy Party
<b>CNP</b>	Chin National Party
<b>CPP</b>	Chin Progressive Party
<b>HR</b>	Human Resource
<b>ICT</b>	Information Communication Technology
<b>INDP</b>	Inn National Development Party
<b>IPU</b>	Inter-Parliamentary Union
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>KPP</b>	Kayin People's Party
<b>KSDDP</b>	Kayin State Democracy and Development Party
<b>MPs</b>	Members of Parliament
<b>NDF</b>	National Democratic Force
<b>NDI</b>	National Democratic Institute
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>NLD</b>	National League for Democracy
<b>NUP</b>	National Unity Party
<b>PNO</b>	Pa-O National Organization
<b>PSDP</b>	Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party
<b>RNDP</b>	Rakhine Nationalities Democratic Party
<b>SNDP</b>	Shan Nationalities Development Party
<b>TPNP</b>	Ta'ang Palaung National Party
<b>UDPKS</b>	Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USDP</b>	Union Solidarity and Development Party
<b>WDP</b>	Wa Democratic Party

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Myanmar Parliament (The Hluttaw) was opened in 2011. As the first Hluttaw ends and the second Hluttaw commences in February 2016, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) together with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) conducted a survey of outgoing Members of Parliament. The survey aimed to record and capture MP's views on how the first Hluttaw operated. Sixty nine elected MPs were interviewed in July 2015, fourteen female and fifty five males from a cross-section of political parties. This represented 10% of the entire parliament, and 14% of elected MPs.

This report, 'Survey of Myanmar Members of Parliament: Reflections from the First Hluttaw', describes the main findings of the survey and makes recommendations which could be taken on board by the new Parliamentary leadership of the second Hluttaw; thereby building upon the considerable progress made to date in making the Hluttaw an effective Parliamentary institution. The findings also validate the objectives of the Myanmar Hluttaw Strategic Plan 2015-2018 (Strategic Plan) which identifies institutional development priorities until 2018.

The main survey findings and recommendations are as follows:

### 1. Operation of the Parliament

The Speakers played a pivotal role in the operation of the first Hluttaw and exceeded the expectations of the majority of MPs. The MPs recognised the need for the development of an effective process for assessing and reviewing

parliamentary rules and procedures in order to improve the decision making process in the plenary and to assist committees in fulfilling their purpose and potential. Improvements in procedural reform could include the creation of a parliamentary calendar, the creation of business committees in each House to advise and draft the weekly and daily agendas and to ensure the effective management of parliamentary business, and the creation of a procedure committee in each House to make recommendations on reforms to the rules of procedure.

### 2. Parliamentary Roles

MPs noted that it was unrealistic for individual MPs to be experts in all Parliamentary roles and that the focus on law-making during the first Hluttaw impacted adversely on their abilities to undertake other Parliamentary roles, especially representation. An effective Parliamentary institution should be able to draw upon MPs who can undertake a diverse range of roles and who have different types of expertise as well as a basic overview of all Parliamentary responsibilities. During the second Hluttaw, it is recommended that changes to the parliamentary procedures and arrangements be made, to support and encourage MPs to undertake responsibilities that reflect their individual priorities. This would allow some MPs to focus on constituency work, others to become experts in oversight, and others to focus on policy or law making.

### 3. Constituency Working

The large amount of time spent in the Hluttaw in Naypyidaw made it difficult for many MPs, and nearly impossible for some MPs, to effectively engage with their constituents and to carry out work in their constituencies. MPs from remote constituencies experienced challenges with transportation, personal safety (especially females) and a lack of financial and human resources to support their work.

### 4. Life as an MP

Contrary to their expectations, most MPs found that they made many friends across all political parties and from across the country which created a congenial atmosphere in parliament. However, many MPs found it difficult to combine being an MP with family life. This was especially the case for MPs with young children and for

female MPs, who are expected to look after both their children and their elderly relatives.

### 5. Services of the Parliament

MPs identified the need for improved support for administrative and research tasks and capacity-building for parliamentary staff in these areas. The Hluttaw administration has an ongoing process of change and development to meet these growing needs.

### 6. Orientation, Induction and ongoing Professional Development of MPs

The first Hluttaw had limited staff resources and virtually no experience in inducting new MPs. There is a need for an effective orientation and induction programme for the new Hluttaw as well as ongoing training and support to enable new MPs to effectively carry out their roles.

## INTRODUCTION



Democratisation in Myanmar is an ongoing process. Much has been achieved, but much more remains to be done. The next Myanmar Hluttaw will play a crucial role in furthering democracy, but it requires further development and investment in order to reach its full potential and be recognised as an effective democratic institution. That process has begun and has been facilitated by the Hluttaw with support from the United Nations' Development Programme (UNDP) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the United Kingdom House of Commons and other national and international agencies. The challenge for the next Myanmar parliament is to harness and consolidate progress to date, and to ensure an ongoing process which builds and nurtures support for new MPs.

Parliaments fulfil a number of important functions including law-making, oversight and representation. They also play a



role in shaping political behaviour through their formal and informal institutional rules. Rules and practices develop early in the life of an institution and tend to become locked-in, in turn, producing embedded and enduring cultural characteristics and associated ways of doing business.

This report gathers information about the early experiences and perspectives of Myanmar MPs during the first Hluttaw. It looks in detail at MPs' early interactions with the Hluttaw and highlights how they have adapted to their role as parliamentarians. The results presented here are intended to be used as guidance for the Hluttaw when supporting new members arriving in 2016: in the preparation of services, information and an induction programme; and as guidance for the new parliamentary leadership in terms of the type of institutional and procedural reforms that can address MPs concerns for a more effective and open legislature.

This survey has been conducted by UNDP in partnership with the IPU as part of joint support to the strengthening of the Myanmar Hluttaw. The report is based on information gathered during interviews with MPs. Senior officials and political leaders in the parliament exercised a crucial enabling function in facilitating this research. The team enjoyed privileged access to elected members of the Myanmar Hluttaw over eight days in early July 2015. In that period, the team interviewed 69 elected MPs during face-to-face meetings with groups of between one and five MPs. The sample equates to approximately 10% of all Myanmar MPs or 14% of elected MPs. The members were drawn from all political parties and all regions of Myanmar. They included both male and female MPs – all four female MPs in the Amyotha and 10 female Pyithu MPs participated in interviews. MPs were also drawn from all age categories. Their all levels of education and they came from a wide variety of professional, skilled and unskilled backgrounds.

MPs were provided with a series of questions written in Myanmar in advance of interviews. Interviews were recorded (where permission was granted) and then transcribed according to an agreed template for logging data. MPs spoke in Myanmar which was simultaneously translated except when MPs expressed a preference to conduct the interview in English.

The research team gathered information on political party affiliation, age, gender, constituency and committee membership/role from each MP. The interview questions included a series of behavioural and attitudinal questions. MPs were asked about their motivations for seeking election; their knowledge of the parliamentary institution; their working practices in parliament; their perceptions of their role; their hopes and expectations; and, their perspectives on the future and evolution of the institution. The MPs were also asked about their early experience of parliament in terms of the assistance they received from the institution and what support, resources and facilities they consider important for the next intake of MPs.

The research team also met with senior officials and other parliamentary staff who detailed their interactions with MPs and parliamentary colleagues.

It aims to capture the views of Myanmar's first elected representatives about their experiences of the operation of the Hluttaw. The report provides a detailed record of the experiences of MPs and includes ideas and options about how to design an induction and orientation programme, and how to provide ongoing professional development for MPs, and suggestions from MPs as to the areas where they felt that institutional and procedural reforms are needed to improve the workings of the parliament. The report also provides useful data and information to the Hluttaw that is relevant to the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2015-2018.

## OPERATION OF THE PARLIMENT



The Hluttaw shares similar characteristics with other parliamentary institutions, however, its relative youth makes it unique. Despite initial reservations (and some scepticism) about the institution, the Myanmar parliament has proved to be resilient and it has produced some tangible and important outputs.

Many MPs are positive about their experience of the new institution and perhaps most importantly, the majority of MPs expressed faith in the institution and its future potential. In response to the question, 'what has surprised you most about being an MP?' the members focused on the positive dimensions of being a Myanmar MP. In this context, they emphasised the political impact rather than the personal impact of being an MP.



MPs were clearly of the view that the Hluttaw had developed into a proper parliamentary institution and that it was not simply an arm of the executive. Many MPs were surprised at how the parliament operated from the outset, and in particular the extent to which freedom of speech is allowed within the chamber. Not all MPs anticipated this. Instead they had expected fewer opportunities for open discussion and a limited ability to oversee government. This positive view of the institution is shared by MPs across political parties. Although MPs are conscious that their ability to effect far-reaching and immediate change is limited, they are nevertheless appreciative that they have an ability to speak up for their constituents, to propose draft legislation and to question the government.

MPs were generally positive about what they viewed as the supportive role played by the Speakers during the lifetime of the Hluttaw. In particular, MPs welcomed having access to the Speakers and were surprised at the level of constructive engagement between MPs and Speakers. A number of MPs praised both Speakers for the facilitating role they played in allowing a constructive and collegial atmosphere to develop in the chamber.

***“The leadership provided by the Speaker has been good ... he has not been particularly restrictive.”***

The manner in which the Hluttaw has been operating has been largely positive. Relative to parliaments elsewhere, the Hluttaw is notable for its reliance on consensus based politics and a relative absence of conflict-riven debates and legislative processes. The Pyithu (Lower

House) and Amyotha (Upper House) Hluttaws have begun the processes of developing their own institutional identities, and disagreements between the two Houses were generally regarded with respect and resolved in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Joint House) according to the Constitutional arrangements. Although the evolution of the Hluttaw has been promising, the system is still young and aspects of it remain flawed.

The achievements of the young parliament are notable. However, the institution has also been subject to some criticism, not just for the 25% of its seats reserved for the military, but also for the limited progress it has made in addressing and responding to the many political, economic and social challenges facing the Myanmar state. This latter criticism is not unusual. Dissatisfaction with the operation of parliament and frustration with the pace of progress is common in parliamentary institutions across the world. For this reason, democratic parliaments are constantly changing. Much of the change process tends to be incremental in nature, but it is invariably guided by attempts to make the institution more effective in meeting the needs of society.

In Myanmar, the early parliamentary experience is being pursued in something of a vacuum as the principles associated with democratic governance are still to become fixed and embedded. During the lifetime of the Hluttaw, MPs came to appreciate the breadth of their responsibilities and also the obstacles they face in fully meeting their responsibilities as public representatives. They identified some Hluttaw practices which inhibit their actions and prevent them from producing optimal decisions. The complexity of the legislative system is challenging for new MPs everywhere.

In Myanmar, however, it is further challenging because MPs had limited parliamentary experience and there existed no institutional memory or long-term support staff to guide their transition to Hluttaw life. The more detailed challenges for the institution include the following:

***Parliament should be able to check and balance government, but because government is not always receptive, the process of oversight has been sensitive.***

#### **Government Oversight**

MPs have gradually become more comfortable asking questions and seeking information, and they welcome the opportunity to engage directly with government ministers. Many members were initially surprised at the level of government responsiveness, but also made clear during interviews that even greater responsiveness by the government to parliament is warranted to allow MPs to effectively access information and to elicit satisfactory responses.

Many MPs did not initially feel confident that they had the necessary tools and skills to perform their scrutiny function and to oversee government. As well as being unsure about how to frame questions, they were also unclear as to how probing their inquiries could be. Some MPs noted that there is a persistent need to check that agreed policies are being fully and properly implemented. This is an unwelcome distraction for those MPs who wish to focus on advancing policy rather than constantly

monitoring the policy implementation process. MPs also expressed some dissatisfaction with how the Executive understands the role of the parliament in a democratic political system in terms of the need to be responsive, and responsible to, parliament.

#### **Parliamentary Calendar**

Many MPs expressed unhappiness with the manner in which parliamentary business is organised. A key criticism is the absence of a parliamentary calendar. The inability to know the parliamentary schedule in advance has a negative impact on the efficiency of MPs' work. Parliamentary institutions elsewhere prepare the parliamentary calendar for the coming year in advance. The Executive Government often has a role here, but major political parties represented in the Parliament also tend to be involved in designing and managing the schedule through, for example, representation on a House Business Committee. Agreeing a fixed parliamentary calendar means that the timing of sessions becomes a matter of routine. It lends a degree of predictability to the operation of the institution and regulates its work. It allows MPs to plan their (parliamentary and constituency) timetables, to prepare for upcoming debates, and to engage more effectively with the parliamentary work programme. Currently, MPs (and staff) struggle to know when the next stage of a bill is going to be discussed, making it very difficult to prioritise and prepare for debates. The Hluttaw also lacks a detailed weekly/biweekly agenda and a Notice Paper with detail in relation to the status of Bills and other motions for debate, parliamentary questions, committee report discussions, etc. Here again, the availability of a parliamentary schedule would allow for greater preparation and improved engagement.

**Parliamentary Procedures and Processes:**

MPs' views on parliamentary procedures and processes differed. Some members voiced no objections to the manner in which the house operates. Some expressed a concern that the Speaker had too much discretionary authority and criticised the manner in which legislation is produced.

*The same bills keep coming back to the plenary to be amended, although they have already been previously amended.*

58% of survey respondents noted that they do not have enough time to consider a proposal from the government before having to make a decision in committees.

**Parliamentary Questions**

The process of asking parliamentary questions and soliciting satisfactory answers is difficult for many new members. There is some sense

among MPs that the executive may not fully appreciate the role MPs can and should play in scrutinising government. While some MPs also had concerns about the imposition of time limits for questions (i.e. three minutes is too short to ask a detailed question) others expressed reservations about the extent to which the Speaker has discretion in relation to the tabling of questions.

**Committee Work**

Involvement in committees has presented both rewards and some challenges for MPs. Here too, there are resource constraints. Many MPs are pleased to be involved in committee work, and there is some sense that their contributions, particularly in relation to the scrutiny of Bills and the Budget, can produce important outputs. Members pointed to how some committees can be effective in agreeing and advancing policy solutions, and in remedying inefficient public administration practices. However, committees also face difficulties. In particular, members were adamant that more resources and greater research assistance is needed to support the work of committees and that this should be distributed equally among committees.

*The authority and the budgets of committees are weak and capacity is low. Committees haven't reached an international standard.*

*Staff support and development are necessary in my committee.*

*MPs and committee staff should be sent overseas to experience how other committee systems work.*

MPs stated that they did not receive sufficient support, and required both a greater volume of research and information and more support staff. Other surveys also highlighted this issue, with only 22% of MPs stating they received enough support.

MPs also expressed dissatisfaction with the levels of openness and transparency in committees. Unlike parliamentary committees elsewhere, in the Hluttaw, committees do not engage with citizens. Civil society, policy experts and stakeholders are not invited to

contribute to the work of committees, and the deliberations and reports produced by committees are not made public. Other surveys indicate that 80% of MP respondents support public hearings for committees and 54% favour the opening up of committee meetings to the public.

Many MPs expressed clear views and ideas about how the operation of the Hluttaw might be enhanced. The following survey extract captures key responses and proposals which were noted by many MPs.

**Case-Study 1: The Problems with Parliament**

"In terms of parliamentary support, a parliamentary calendar and schedule should be provided. The schedule (at least for 2 weeks) should be announced before the session, so that MPs will have sufficient time to prepare. Currently, the Hluttaw faces difficulties in receiving Ministerial responses to questions in a timely fashion. This means that the publication of the schedule is delayed."

"A further challenge is in relation to the Hluttaw's rules and procedures. As the Speaker decides what to discuss, MPs do not generally know when their questions and proposals will be discussed in the plenary. There are also time limits in relation to the discussion of bills. MPs do not know what kind of bills will be discussed in the plenary. Before the session, the Hluttaw should announce which bill will be discussed and MPs should have the right to request the discussion of specific bills and copies of those same bills. MPs generally only have three days to scrutinise the bill. The Bills Committee should operate in a more transparent manner."



## PARLIAMENTARY ROLES AND CONSTITUENCY WORKING



### Parliamentary Roles

MPs have three distinct roles: law-making, representation and oversight of the government. To date, the Hluttaw has focused primarily on law making to the detriment of representation and oversight. This was recognised by MPs in the survey.

In other Parliaments, while most MPs will combine law-making, representation and oversight of government roles, it is impossible for MPs to be expert in all areas. Some MPs choose to develop one of these roles more extensively. For example, some MPs will focus primarily on their constituencies and see

themselves first and foremost as a constituency representatives. Others will develop expertise in particular subject areas, possibly through their committee work, while others focus on law-making and policy. Collectively, these different approaches make for a strong and diverse parliament and allow the institution to draw on various types of expertise.

*New MPs should develop expertise in a specific subject.*

### Constituency Working

Constituency work is a critically important part of the MP's role. Myanmar MPs have reached out to their constituents and have attempted to address the interests and needs of their constituencies. However, they face considerable constraints. Myanmar's parliamentary sittings require MPs to spend much more of their time during the year working in the Hluttaw. The majority of MPs noted that they spend substantially more time on parliamentary work and less on constituency work.

MPs feel an acute obligation to their constituents and wish to be visible and available. However, they are conscious of their inability to remain closely connected with constituencies when parliament is in session. There is a clear dilemma here. The need for MPs to be in close contact with constituents, and to be seen to be responsive to local needs and interests, is an important dimension of their work, and simultaneously a means of ensuring re-election. This latter form of reasoning, however, was not readily apparent among Myanmar MPs. Their preference to spend more time on

constituency work appears to be born of a desire to be responsive to their constituency, to meet public expectations of their role and to defend their political record. A number of MPs suggested that time management skills may be helpful in allowing them to better balance their

*There needs to be a better balance between Hluttaw and constituency work.*

MPs whose constituencies are far from Naypyidaw find it difficult to return home regularly. A number of MPs indicated that they only visit their constituencies during parliamentary recess periods. In addition, the size and remoteness of constituencies is problematic. It is not always physically possible for MPs to travel to parts of their own constituencies, as transport infrastructure may be poor and during certain seasons, it may not be possible to reach some communities due to poor weather conditions. The problems may be even more acute for female MPs who experience safety issues when travelling around their constituencies.

Members suggested that the parliamentary calendar should be designed so as to allow them to visit their constituencies on a regular basis. Many advocated that their time be split 50/50 between parliament and constituency work. In contrast, a minority of MPs were of the view that there is an organic link between parliamentary and constituency work and so it is difficult to achieve a pure balance. One MP noted that the imbalance is acceptable given that he is working for his constituents in parliament. Overall, however, the current lack of balance produces a series of challenges for Myanmar MPs and has clear implications for



the extent to which many can engage with constituency work.

Some MPs spoke of the (high) expectations which citizens have, and of MPs' inability to meet these. Many attempt to overcome their lack of physical presence in their constituencies by maintaining telephone and electronic contact and communication with constituents, but this is not always satisfactory. Some MPs have used volunteers to assist them, but currently, there is no available budget to support constituency staff and/or offices. As a consequence, their presence in the constituency is highly limited and this means difficulties in terms

of meeting with constituents and managing their expectations. Many MPs were clear about the need for greater support to allow them to undertake their constituency duties more effectively.

However, for many MPs, the ability to defend and pursue the interests of their constituency has been one of the most rewarding aspects of life as an MP. MPs surveyed expressed some surprise that parliament proved to be an effective route for raising constituency related issues and for influencing developments in the regions and across the country.

***In rural areas, female MPs are constrained by cultural difficulties in relation to women travelling alone' (male MP).***

***" There are 150 villages in my constituency and I did not have time to visit all of them during the one and a half month recess. "***

***"The voice of the people can be heard through MPs who have an ability to speak up and work for people. "***

***" I can support my constituency and influence its development. "***

***" I have been able to contribute to the peace process. "***

## LIFE AS AN MP



In Myanmar, the experience of being an MP has been a surprisingly positive one for many MPs. Many MPs felt proud to be members of the Hluttaw and were thankful to voters for allowing them to play a role in the new parliament. Although parliaments often tend to be combative in nature, the Myanmar Hluttaw was seen to be an institution where MPs feel comfortable. All MPs interviewed for this research believe that they have friends in the institution.

***" I have made a lot of friends across different political parties and from around the country. "***



The following view was a typical response from many MPs: MPs expressed genuine warmth for colleagues, and this crosses party lines. The consensual and business-like atmosphere which has been fostered in the Hluttaw may be a factor in explaining this level of collegiality. MPs' living arrangements (i.e. living side by side in government housing) also likely had a positive impact on personal relations. Friendships may also be understood with reference to the seating arrangements in the parliamentary chamber. Elected Myanmar MPs do not sit according to political party membership, instead they are seated in alphabetical order according to their constituency. These factors inevitably bring elected MPs from all backgrounds into regular contact with each other, and it is conceivable that these physical arrangements promote a collegial and mutually respectful atmosphere. Although MPs make friends in parliament, there are other aspects of life as an MP which are less positive.

**Separation from Family:** For MPs whose constituencies are located at a distance from Naypyidaw, there are few opportunities to return to their homes during the parliamentary session. From a well-being perspective, it results in an MP being separated from his/her family for extended periods of time. Over 90% of the MPs interviewed for this report were married and a high majority of these MPs also had children. MPs expressed a variety of views about the impact of this separation on their personal and family lives.

It is clear from the interviews that having the support of family is crucially important to many MPs. A supportive family enables an MP to commit fully to his/her work as a public representative. However, for a number of MPs,

family support is not always forthcoming. Some families resent the adverse impact which being an MP has on family life. Other families have concerns which are grounded in a fear that being involved in political life is potentially dangerous.

Generational differences can be observed in how being an MP impacts on family life. Older MPs with adult children do not necessarily equate being an MP with having a negative impact on their personal lives. Often their spouse can live with them in Naypyidaw and this eases the personal pressures they may feel. For younger MPs with young children, the situation is quite different. These MPs are effectively separated from their families and it is a source of sadness.

In these instances, an MP's family undertakes to raise children and to care for elderly parents and MPs often feel a sense of loneliness, separation and detachment as a consequence of their physical and emotional distance.

**Difficulties Facing Female MPs:** Women MPs expressed a variety of views in relation to how their career choice has personally impacted on them. Those who had previously been politically active and those with adult children noted little difference between their lives pre- and post-election. For this group, life before the election was tumultuous and often involved spending time away from home. In this context, the adjustment to life as an MP was not as marked as for other less activist MPs (and this applied to both male and female MPs). However, for female MPs with young children and/or elderly parents, there were practical and emotional difficulties involved in being separated from family.



MPs face practical difficulties in trying to reconcile family and political life. Many MPs advised that improved (and larger) housing and accommodation facilities would allow them to maintain closer contact with their families, while the provision of childcare services in the parliament would mean that MPs (particularly female MPs and staff) could have their young

children live with them.

The following case-study reflects the type of concerns and worries which many female MPs mentioned.

It is clear that being away from home and away from their children is a source of anxiety for many female MPs.

## Case-Study 2: The Difficulties Facing Female MPs

I have been worried about my teenage sons because drugs are a serious issue in my state. In order to avoid drugs, I would like to bring my family to live with me. However, there are no job opportunities and no universities here. The rooms are also quite small and will not fit the whole family. I am away for such long periods that my sons have become rude. My youngest son is spoiled because he has been living without any guidance from his mother. But even though the personal and maternal challenges are so great, I would still love to be re-elected for the next term.

### Financial Impact

A small number of MPs alluded to the impact being an MP has on their financial situation. MPs with business interests have had to sacrifice these in order to be active parliamentarians. A number of the MPs interviewed for this research spoke of the 'adverse impact' that being an MP had had on a range of personal business, healthcare and farming interests. One MP spoke of having to close his business since becoming an MP. Many MPs stated they appreciated the salary they received from the Hluttaw, but overall they felt their benefits were far below what was required for the job and available in other parliaments even in the region.

### Challenges Faced by Women MPs

Political life presents Myanmar women with a series of profound political and personal challenges. Many of these are common to female MPs in other parliaments. While not all female MPs perceive difficulties in raising and pursuing women's issues in the parliament, some MPs interviewed did feel that also faced challenges professionally, as well as personally. One female MP suggested that the Executive does not understand women's issues and another alluded to feelings of being ignored (although she acknowledged that her ethnic party attachment may be a factor in this regard). Overall, a majority of female MPs were clear in their views that it is difficult to be a female MP in Myanmar. Female MPs perceptions are that 'in terms of challenges, female MPs face more than male MPs,' that 'women MPs have to work twice as hard as men because when they go home they have to look after the family,' and that women MPs have to put in double the effort.' One female MP noted that in some remote villages within her constituency, a female MP does not enjoy the same status or respect as a male counterpart.

## SERVICES OF THE PARLIAMENT



MPs were clear that the services currently available in the Hluttaw do not fully meet the needs of a modern parliamentary institution. Relative to other parliaments, the Hluttaw remains under-staffed and under-resourced, and so faces challenges in responding comprehensively to the substantial volume and range of requests it receives from MPs. This is in spite of the Hluttaw being served by an administration which has grown in size and capacity and offers a number of important services and support systems to assist MPs in undertaking their parliamentary duties. The provision of services has advanced and expanded over time and this process has been strongly supported by MPs,



and facilitated by political and administrative leaders. These include, in particular, services to the plenary and committees, library and research services, administrative, international relations and ICT support. However, the survey identified where the gaps in service provision are, and how they might be addressed.

### **Parliamentary Staff Development**

MPs noted that parliamentary staff should not change from one election to the next – they represent permanency in the Hluttaw and so require education and upskilling to help them to create a permanently supportive environment for MPs, which in turn enhances the functions and outputs of the institution.

Overall, MPs were strongly supportive of parliamentary staff capacity-building. They appreciate the need to support staff recruitment, training and development and they understand that this type of investment provides a key means of supporting not just current MPs, but future generations too.

MPs appreciate and value the services provided by the Hluttaw and welcome the work done by the Hluttaw Research and Library Service and support the expansion of this unit. Whilst being positive about the quality of existing administrative arrangements, MPs still desire an increase in the level of institutional support available to them. They MPs expressed a need for two distinct forms of support:

### **1. Administrative and Secretarial Support**

Many MPs noted that they would benefit from assistance with the secretarial dimension to their work. MPs who are unfamiliar and inexperienced with technology and computers were particularly keen to have some form of administrative support. A number of MPs welcomed the administrative support they received through the National Democratic Institute (NDI) Resource Centre. This included assistance with typing and printing. Some MPs favour each MP having a dedicated parliamentary assistant.

### **2. Research and Committee Support**

In a recent Hluttaw Research Survey (2015), MPs advised that more briefings directly related to current legislative and budgetary proposals, and international developments would be useful. They also advocated improved and more regular communication between research staff

and MPs, possibly using electronic means. There is some sense too that awareness of the service among MPs is not extensive. A weak parliamentary tradition means that MPs have varied expectations in relation to what types of support are available to assist them.

***‘There should be more staff and a better recruitment and selection process’.***

***‘Parliamentary staff do not have specialist skills’.***

***‘Capacity building for the secretariat is needed so that MPs can perform even better’.***

***‘MPs need Hluttaw staff to provide greater assistance and more accurate advice and information’.***

## ORIENTATION, INDUCTION AND ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF MPs



MPs shared their experiences of arriving to the Hluttaw as new MPs, and provided insight into their own professional development needs.

### **Preparedness for Being an MP**

In 2011, Myanmar MPs' feelings of pride following their election were mixed with a degree of anxiety. Many MPs admitted to knowing little about the Hluttaw's operation before they were elected and that their expectations of the institution were unclear. Although members expressed an unreserved willingness to undertake parliamentary duties and responsibilities, they did not understand what precisely those duties and responsibilities were, and how they might

be best pursued. MPs tended to define their initial impressions of parliament in terms of an educational experience: this reflects that MPs came to the Hluttaw with a lot to learn and

faced a steep learning curve. They were clear in the view that they were poorly prepared to engage with the institution.

MPs admitted:

***'I felt like a new student.'***

***'The people in parliament became like classmates.'***

***'I did not know what to do in parliament.'***

***'The parliament is so new that there is no one with parliamentary experience to learn from.'***

***'I could not ask questions due to my lack of experience.'***

***'In fact, I did not know what to do and what responsibilities an MP should have.'***

Some MPs explicitly noted the lack of assistance, advice and support they received from the institution following their election:

***Initially it was difficult to get information.***

***I expected a lot, but I did not get adequate information; staff were not trained; and IT and communication skills were not there.***

Others attempted to up-skill through personal study by reading books and by examining the work of other parliaments. For some ethnic MPs, language issues were problematic.



### Advice to Incoming MPs

*The MPs interviewed had shrewd and astute advice for new MPs arriving in 2016. They urged new MPs to 'come with the right mind-set and be open to working together for the good of the country', noting that 'MPs should be understanding and patient. Some amount of time is needed but if we all try hard, we will be successful.' A key message was that 'there will be challenges but be persistent, be brave. Adaptability is important.' In urging new MPs to be ready and prepared for the challenges of being a parliamentarian, current MPs acknowledge that there is much to be learned. Much of their advice for new MPs concerns urging the next generation to engage with a learning process. They advised MPs to 'take the opportunity to attend capacity building seminars; learn and have regular engagement with international organisations and NGOs', to 'open your eyes and learn from international perspectives.' More generally, MPs advised their successors to 'observe, listen and learn well,' and build their own skills.*

### Orientation, Induction and Guidance to new MPs

The MPs said that the Myanmar parliament did not provide a substantial programme of assistance to new MPs on their arrival in Naypyidaw. The institution did provide some practical assistance to the new arrivals in terms of travel and accommodation arrangements, but no formal programme designed to welcome, orientate or induct MPs was available. They did receive booklets which detailed parliamentary rules, regulations and procedures. However, many MPs admitted that although these documents were useful and important, they were also weighty, technical and difficult to distil in a short period of time.

Some training opportunities materialised a few months later, and were provided by the Speaker.

This training related specifically to the work of the four Standing Committees and spanned a period of two months. Other useful support came from political parties. The USDP delivered some assistance to its MPs, but other smaller and less-resourced parties did not have the capacity to engage in similar support exercises. International organisations also provided some practical assistance and workshop training for new MPs. These learning opportunities focused on international experience and best practice and MPs were favourable to the provision of this type of advice and information. A number of organisations did provide opportunities for MPs to visit other parliaments and this was universally welcomed by MPs. Such organisations, however, are often restricted in terms of the level of access they have or the extent to which their support is accepted (and

complementary to other internal and external support). Importantly however, external assistance was facilitated by the Hluttaw leadership and demonstrated an openness to engagement with international organisations.

***New MPs [should] invite us to share knowledge and our previous experiences.***

There was near universal support for a targeted orientation and induction programme for new MPs. A strong majority of members favoured the induction and orientation programme being delivered in advance of the first session of the new parliament during a period ranging from 3-5 days. In addition, MPs preferred that the programme be delivered to small groups

of approximately 20-30 members drawn from across political parties. Some suggested that the induction and orientation programme might usefully be delivered according to committee membership.

***'Former MPs should give advice to new MPs'***

There is an apparent willingness among MPs to impart their knowledge and experience of parliamentary life and to use that to benefit the next generation. This openness to engagement with future MPs indicates a high level of commitment to the parliament and to the consolidation of the institution. Harnessing this goodwill by using existing members to mentor new MPs provides an opportunity to positively influence the operation of the next parliament.

*These included; British Council; Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), National Democratic Institute (NDI), Nordic Development Fund (NDF), Parliamentary Centre (Canada), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).*

*MPs have visited parliaments in Europe, Asia and North America. China, India and parliamentary institutions in South East Asia were the most visited, but MPs had also observed parliaments in Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.*

*These themes and the following tables reflect the preferences of over 90% of the MPs interviewed*

## Professional Development Needs

MPs preferences for professional development support are focused around two broad themes<sup>6</sup>:

### 1. Knowledge and information:

- *Fundamentals and dynamics of the political system*  
(‘how parliament works’)
- *Democracy, human rights, rule of law*
- *Role of the MP*
- *Parliamentary services and facilities*
- *Parliamentary legislative process*
- *Parliamentary budgetary process*
- *Ethics / Code of conduct for MPs*
- *Policy-focused seminars (e.g. ‘challenges facing Myanmar’;*  
*‘understanding the market’)*

### 2. Skills Training

- *How to contribute effectively to committees*
- *How to draft a parliamentary question*
- *How to write a speech*
- *How to draft/scrutinise and amend a bill*
- *Public speaking skills*
- *IT skills*
- *Time management*
- *Media skills*
- *English (and Myanmar) language training*

Some of the needs identified above can be addressed during the initial orientation programme. Others are best delivered as part of a longer-term training programme which offers a variety of opportunities to MPs. These may come in the form of, for example, a one-off/repeated seminar on social media use,

regular (weekly) English language lessons, time management workshop, etc. These types of seminars/workshops address very specific needs and will appeal to a specific audience. For example, not all MPs will be interested in, or need to improve their language/social media/time management skills. This offers MPs

flexibility in terms of managing their learning and allows them to choose subjects and topics which cater to their individual needs.

Female MPs expressed an interest in providing female only training and workshop opportunities which would be available to members of the Hluttaw, and female members of the state and regional institutions.

Female members advocate the creation of a support system specifically focused on the needs and concerns of female members. A Women’s Forum may be a base for the delivery of specific training and mentoring relevant to female members and should be administered by Hluttaw staff, but managed by the female members themselves. The number and timing of meetings, choice of agenda items, seminar

topics, discussion points, invited speakers, etc. are best agreed between female MPs.

The majority of MPs are IT literate. All have mobile phones and many have access to computers and tablets. They are also beginning to engage with social media – Facebook appears to be the preferred mode of online engagement.

The extent to which MPs utilise these facilities, however, is affected by the poor quality of internet access within the Hluttaw (and in some cases, concerns about the security of the network). A small minority of MPs are not well acquainted with how to use IT equipment, software and applications. Many of these issues are being addressed in the context of the ICT Strategic Plan (2015-2018) which details plans to operationalise a digital parliament.

6: Myanmar Hluttaw, Hluttaw Research Survey, 2015.

These themes and the following tables reflect the preferences of over 90% of the MPs interviewed and surveyed for this report.



## Orientation and Induction

New MPs around the world are increasingly able to avail of programmes, resources and facilities designed to aid their transition to life as a parliamentarian. Orientation and induction programmes take different forms in different parliamentary settings, but typically they are built around information sessions and include the supply of handbooks and hand-outs. The US Congress delivers an advanced orientation programme to new members and the UK has also developed new structures and resources to support incoming MPs. Other parliaments have developed more sophisticated forms of induction which are developmental in nature and tailored to the needs of individual MPs.

The UK House of Commons induction and orientation programme for new MPs has developed substantially over the last two decades. Programme adaptation has been responsive to evaluation exercises and feedback from MPs, from political parties and parliamentary leaders, and from administrative staff involved in the delivery of programmes.

The strategic political and administrative investment in these programmes – which often involves a parliamentary committee leading and evaluating programmes – demonstrates their inherent value to the institution. Parliamentary induction and orientation programmes have many dimensions and thus many potential benefits. They can introduce MPs to the institution; identify key administrative and political personnel; communicate important practical and policy information; manage new MPs' expectations; ease the transition to parliamentary life; and create a culture of collegiality between MPs.

Maximising these benefits requires that those who design and deliver an induction and orientation programme are responsive to the views of participants and respectful of their needs and interests. Using feedback has been pivotal in the redesign of programmes elsewhere. An ongoing process of evaluation of the Myanmar parliament will capture how best to meet the needs of MPs as the institution evolves and its membership changes.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Myanmar Hluttaw has developed a strong identity, and Myanmar's MPs have faith in its potential to deliver positive results for the people of Myanmar, whilst recognising the challenges ahead.

Myanmar's MPs are realistic about the evolution of the Hluttaw as an institution, along with the broader political system. For them, progress will come as MPs learn how to best engage with the Hluttaw, with each other, with constituents and with other stakeholders.

The lack of institutional memory and longstanding support has affected their work, and they faced a steep learning curve as they settled into their roles. Their feedback shows the need for additional support to institutional development, and to the continued professional development of MPs, especially at the start of the new parliament in 2016.

The struggles which MPs face are, to some extent, a function of the youth of the institution and the limited levels of preparedness of MPs and parliamentary staff for a new era of parliamentary politics. Creating, operationalizing and consolidating a new political institution – especially when the democratic tradition is weak – represents a highly complex task.

As the democracy evolves in Myanmar, MPs will face increasing demands from constituents, civil society interests, the media and lobbyists, and the support systems available to MPs will

in turn need to become more routinized and more sophisticated, to help the Hluttaw meet the country's greater needs.

In its first term, the Hluttaw has managed significant achievements. It is building impartial research and library services, valued by MPs as a source of information to inform their law-making and oversight work; it has experimented with new committee practices to enhance community engagement, improve quality of information, and demonstrate the independence of the Hluttaw; and it has started the process of building staff capacity, through a Learning Centre which can drive the continued professional development of MPs and staff.

The Hluttaw has been supported through much of this process by various international organisations, including UNDP, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

The next Hluttaw will be in a strong position to tackle the potential difficulties and frustrations of continuing the progress in its institutional development. A support infrastructure is in place, and the Strategic Plan 2015-2018 and Committee Development Plan (2014-2016) provide a clear roadmap for supporting the development of the parliamentary institution. Through these, the administrative leadership has gained valuable experience in planning and implementing institutional reforms.

More importantly, an atmosphere of engagement and willingness to learn pervades the institution, providing a constructive backdrop for future institutional development. Many recommendations that MPs shared are already included in existing development plans. This increases the chances the incoming MPs will demonstrate a similar level of goodwill and support towards their implementation.

Further strengthening Parliamentary processes and procedures, and continuing to build MP and staff capacity, will better enable the Hluttaw to perform its representation, legislation and oversight functions in a balanced manner, and help navigate the challenges of Myanmar's democratic transition.

This section is divided into two: recommendations emerging directly from MPs surveyed, and recommendations which

the survey authors make on the basis of MP feedback, but drawing on international best practice.

### Recommendations Identified by MPs

When a parliamentary institution is allowed to evolve by shaping its facilities and resources in response to the changing needs of MPs, it becomes a stable institution, but one with the capacity to renew and reinvigorate itself from one parliamentary term to the next.

Having spent up to five years in their roles, MPs are in a strong position to identify measures that could help them better perform their functions. The variety of MPs' recommendations and their willingness to become better skilled and informed themselves are testaments to their interest in the well-being of the Hluttaw, and in enhancing the value and legitimacy of the institution.

Key Recommendation	Details	Benefits
Publish a Parliamentary Calendar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a calendar of session start and end dates.</li> <li>Set general timings for sittings of the three chambers</li> <li>Provide more advance notice of parliamentary business (e.g. by establishing weekly/bi-weekly agendas and a Notice Paper on the status of Bills and other motions.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Hluttaw manages its workload more effectively and democratically, as MPs and committees have notice of upcoming business</li> <li>Improves representation by allowing MPs to plan their constituency work</li> <li>Enables higher quality inputs from MPs by allowing for adequate preparation</li> </ul>

Key Recommendation	Details	Benefits
Improve Constituency Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review constituency support and consider what short-term improvements can be made within budget constraints</li> <li>Plan longer-term to support the provision of a constituency office and constituency staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improves the support to MPs' performance of their representation function</li> </ul>
Provide administrative support for MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide pooled administrative services in the Hluttaw</li> <li>Consider what support can be provided to MPs at constituency level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enables MPs to focus on their decision making responsibilities, by reducing the amount of time spent on more secretarial work</li> </ul>
Support Parliamentary Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve number and range of staff supporting the Plenary and Committees</li> <li>Distribute staff equally across administrative departments and parliamentary committees</li> <li>Expand and diversify staff recruitment and introduce best practice HR policies and processes (that comply with Civil Service rules)</li> <li>Provide in-house opportunities for staff training (in cooperation with international organisations), especially skills-training (e.g. servicing committees, drafting briefing papers, etc.)</li> <li>Deliver policy seminars to improve levels of knowledge and expertise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creates a supportive environment for MPs</li> <li>Enables a permanent support system, contributing to institutional memory building</li> <li>Makes appropriate practices part of the normal operational life of the parliament, by introducing impartial services early on.</li> </ul>



Expand Research and Library Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase size and capacity of service</li> <li>● Produce more detailed and regular policy briefings, and briefings directly related to legislative and budgetary proposals and international developments</li> <li>● Provide targeted training for staff</li> <li>● Establish more regular communication between research staff and MPs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improves MP access to quality information and research, ensuring they can make more informed decisions</li> </ul>
Orientation, Induction and Guidance Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Have a dedicated 3-5 day orientation and induction programme, led by the parliamentary and administrative leadership. It could provide an overview of the services available, the entitlements and living arrangements of MPs, and basic information about MP functions, ethics, rules of procedure, the legislative process and budget process, and the operation of committees.</li> <li>● Provide easy to understand materials explaining basic arrangements, services available, and parliamentary rules, regulations and procedures (e.g. a Members Handbook)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthens and legitimates the parliament by recognising that the future vitality of the institution is intimately linked to the way in which MPs learn about how to be a good parliamentarian.</li> <li>● Introduces MPs – practically and figuratively – to the institution</li> <li>● Ensures MPs can identify key administrative and political personnel that they will need to work with</li> <li>● Ensures MPs get important practical and policy information</li> <li>● Manages new MPs expectations, and achieves a basic shared understanding of an MP's role</li> <li>● Eases the transition to parliamentary life</li> <li>● Creates a culture of collegiality between MPs</li> </ul>

Key Recommendation	Details	Benefits
Provide flexible optional longer-term professional development opportunities for MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide skills-enhancing opportunities for MPs (E.g. parliamentary skills, such as how to ask parliamentary questions; how to contribute to committees; how to draft/scrutinise a bill; organisational skills such as time management, and others such as English language and social media use.)</li> <li>● Provide policy briefings and other focused professional development opportunities for MPs to enhance their knowledge (e.g. fundamentals and dynamics of the political system; democracy, human rights, rule of law; understanding markets).</li> <li>● Include dedicated trainings, mentoring opportunities and other professional development opportunities for women MPs, such as a Women's Forum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensures continued professional development across the lifetime of the institution</li> <li>● Enables MPs to engage with the training process according to their needs and interests</li> <li>● Builds a supportive environment for women leaders to enhance their professional development</li> </ul>
Improve MP Living Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create living facilities which allow closer contact between MPs and their families</li> <li>● Develop or arrange for childcare facilities for MPs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enables MPs to commit fully to their work, by ensuring a supportive family environment</li> </ul>

### Further Recommendations for Parliamentary Strengthening

The Hluttaw's existing objectives and planned actions for institutional development are validated by the findings of this report- in particular the Strategic Plan 2015-2018, Committee Development Plan (2014-2016), and ICT Strategic Plan (2015-2018). Additional measures taken by other parliaments around the world to overcome similar challenges to those identified by Myanmar's MPs could further contribute to the strengthening of the

Key Recommendation	Details	Benefits
Creation of a Business Committee	<p>The committee could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improve planning of a parliamentary agenda,</li> <li>● Produce consensus-based recommendations for parliamentary business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facilitates effective management of parliamentary business</li> <li>● Increases efficiency of the institution</li> </ul>
Creation of Procedure Committee	<p>The committee could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facilitate ongoing review of parliamentary rules of procedure to meet the needs of plenary and committees</li> <li>● Produce consensus-based recommendations for procedural reform</li> <li>● Consider and make recommendations on legislative matters relating to the Hluttaw</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improves decision making in the plenary</li> <li>● Improves committee functioning</li> </ul>
Revise committee structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The review's aims could be to: Improve institutional efficiency to undertake oversight and engage with stakeholders and communities</li> <li>● Equalise workloads for MPs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enables MPs to take on a more diverse range of roles and use their expertise</li> <li>● Avoids legislative/scrutiny bottlenecks</li> </ul>

Implement Hluttaw Committee Development Plan (2014-2016).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review committee procedures, to ensure there are no procedural limitations on the ability of committees to perform their functions</li> <li>● Review the procedural support provided by committee staff, to ensure it meets the needs of committees</li> <li>● Review committee processes, such as working with government ministries and public bodies, ways of collecting evidence, and scrutinising the budget, to ensure they are sufficient to allow committees to fulfil their potential Support specific capacity development for committee staff</li> <li>● And other actions specified by the Committee Development Plan Action Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthens ability of committees to perform their legislative, oversight and representation functions</li> <li>● Improves engagement with the executive</li> <li>● Committee staff have the management systems, knowledge and skills required to effectively support the work of committees</li> </ul>
Enhance IT infrastructure and facilities according to the ICT Strategic Plan (2015-2018).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Operationalise plans to create a digital parliament</li> <li>● Increase staff efficiency</li> <li>● Improve internal communication practices</li> <li>● Facilitate greater engagement with IT for staff and MPs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enhances informed decision making by improving ease of access to information and research</li> <li>● Improves public access to information, enabling greater engagement with the parliament</li> </ul>
Support Parliamentary Staff Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In addition to the measures recommended by MPs above, the following could be considered:</li> <li>● Produce a staff code of conduct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Help staff understand and apply rules, processes and procedures correctly and uniformly, and independently and impartially</li> <li>● Guides parliamentary staff about when and how to exercise discretion and judgement</li> </ul>



## APPENDIX 1- COMPOSITION OF THE PARLIAMENT

### Political Party Representation in the Myanmar Parliament, September 2015

Political Parties	Pyithu Hluttaw	Amyotha Hluttaw
USDP	211	118
Tatmadaw	110	53
NLD	37	6
NUP	11	5
SNDP	13	2
RNDP	7	6
AMRDP	3	4
SNLD	4	2
NDF	5	1
CNP	1	3
PNO	3	1
PSDP	2	2
CPP	1	2
WDP	2	1
KPP	1	1
UDPKS	1	1
TPNP	1	1
KSDDP	0	1
DNDP	1	0
NNDP	1	0
INDP	1	0
Independent	1	2
Vacant	5	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>212</b>

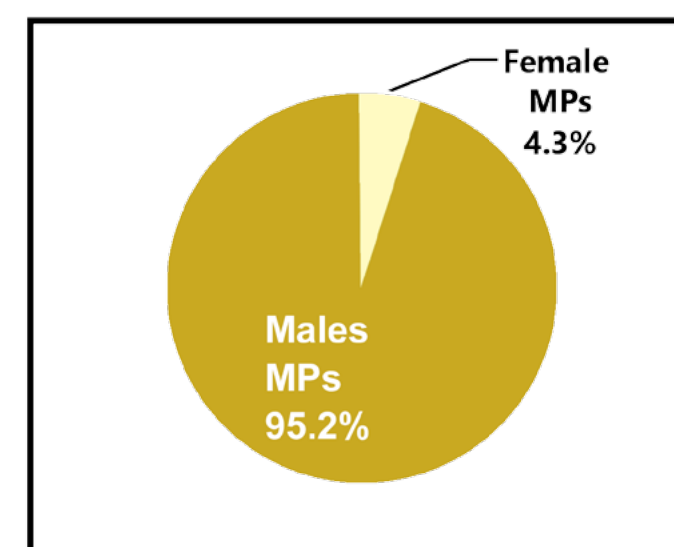
Source: The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2015

**Note:** The 2010 election returned 664 MPs to sit in the two Houses of the Myanmar parliament – 440 in the Lower House, and 224 in the Upper House. The new parliament would be served by a generation of politicians with little previous experience of service in a democratic parliamentary institution. The MPs were split across a number of different parties representing a range of constitutional, political, economic and ethnic interests. Myanmar is highly ethnically diverse and the party system reflects this with MPs representing a wide range of ethnic identities and interests. The current party system crystallised in 2012

following a series of by-elections.

### Female Representation in the Myanmar Parliament

Of the 664 MPs in the Myanmar parliament, 29 or 4.3% are female. The lower house has 25 female MPs and the upper house has four female MPs. These figures are substantially low by international standards. The IPU world ranking of women in parliament places Myanmar in 130th position in terms of the percentage of women in the lower house. The level of female political representation languishes just thirteen points higher than the lowest ranking of 143.



Source: The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2015.

Two of the female MPs are female army officers and were appointed to the lower house in January 2014 by the Tatmadaw leadership. They are the only female military MPs in either house.

## APPENDIX 2 - AGE, EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND OF MYANMAR MPS

### Age of Myanmar MPs

The 2008 Constitution states the minimum age at which a Myanmar citizen can be elected to each house of parliament: 25 years for the lower house and 30 years for the upper house. 'Halfway through the current legislature (mid-2013), the average age of the 658 [Myanmar] national parliamentarians (both elected and appointed) was 54.5 years' (Egreteau 2014, p. 101-102).

Military MPs tend to be younger than their elected counterparts. This is related to the strictly enforced requirement that all military personnel retire at age 60.

The average age of Myanmar MPs is in keeping with the international trend. The global average age for an MP is 53 years (IPU and UNDP 2012, p. 107). The average age of elected MPs in Myanmar is slightly higher than the global average – 57.9 years in the Pyithu and 59.1 years in the Amyotha (Egreteau 2014, p. 102).

### Education of Myanmar MPs

Members of the Myanmar parliament tend to be well-educated with a majority of members being educated to university level: 'Eighty-three per cent of the 658 Burmese MPs registered in 2012 boast a university degree, usually obtained from a domestic academic institution in Myanmar' (Egreteau 2014, p. 112)

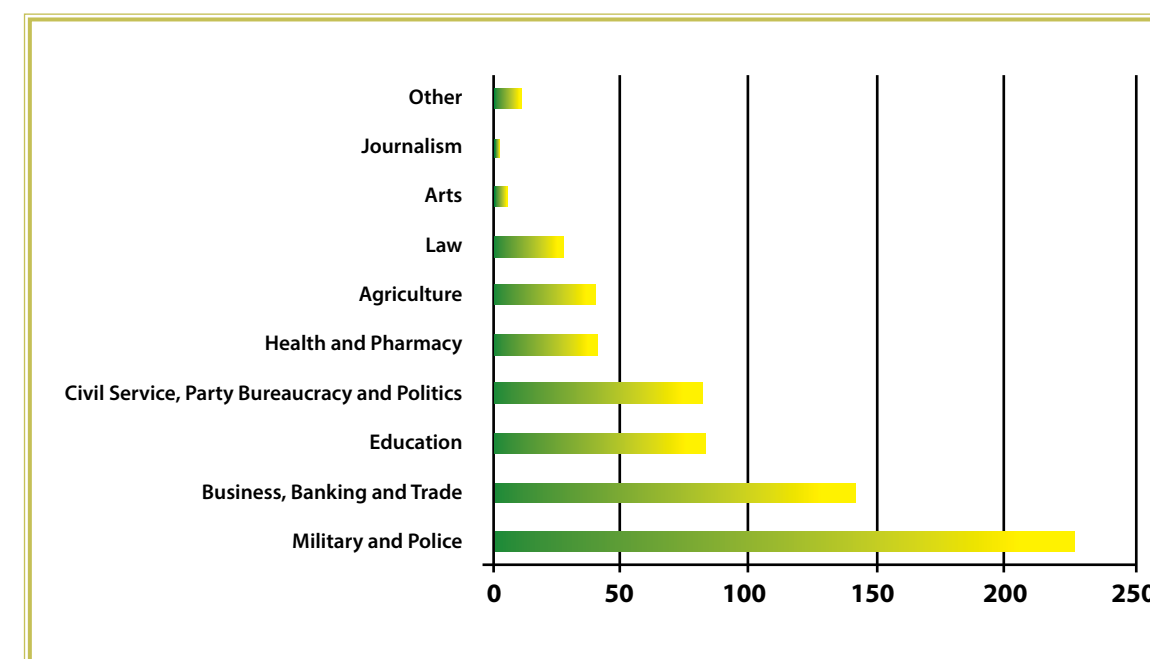
The figure may well have been higher were it not for the fact that some MPs were forced to drop out of university education due to

personal reasons, conflict, arrest or university closure. Military MPs tend to be more educated than their civilian counterparts. A small number of Myanmar MPs have also been educated overseas in China, Russia, the US and Europe.

A minority of Myanmar MPs have low levels of educational attainment. These largely ethnic MPs tend to be from peripheral parts of Myanmar where educational facilities are less developed and where proficiency in the Burmese language may be weaker. It is also the case that a number of MPs from conflict zones may have been engaged in political activities or fighting which prevented their engagement with the educational system.

### Professional Background of Myanmar MPs

Levels of educational qualification are generally linked to spheres of professional activity where MPs have previously had experience. There is an increasing trend in industrialised countries for MPs to have a professional background in politics and the public sector. The Global Parliamentary Report 2012 finds that 28% of the world's parliamentarians come from a politics and public sector background. Those with a background in the private sector (19%), liberal professions (18%) and education (12%) are also well-represented in parliaments around the world. Elected Myanmar MPs do not fit this pattern: 'The substantial majority of the civilian representatives in Myanmar's parliament are involved in trade, business and banking activities' (Egreteau 2014, p. 117).



\* The figure for military and police includes the 166 Tatmadaw members of both houses. Given the history of insurgency in Myanmar, the additional 61 MPs include not just retired military personnel and police officers, but also former rebels connected to armed militias. Source: Egreteau 2014, p. 116-118.

In addition, over 80 MPs are education professionals and a similar number previously worked in the political sphere, as civil servants or as party administrators. In other political systems, there is an increasing trend towards political 'careerism' or 'parliamentary professionalization'. This refers to a growing prevalence for MPs to have backgrounds in what are termed 'politics facilitating' professions. These include law, politics, education and journalism. Having experience of these professions can provide a useful stepping stone into politics (Cairney 2007). It can also prepare MPs for the demands of parliamentary life and help MPs to fulfil a complex legislative function. Parliamentarians with professional legal experience bring these skills to the chamber and can play an important role in professionalizing the operation of the parliamentary institution. In contrast to other political systems however, just 17 Myanmar MPs possess legal qualifications and have a background in the Myanmar legal system. Typically, parliaments have a relatively

high number of legal specialists. Other backgrounds represented in the Myanmar parliament include medicine and pharmacy, and agriculture. In addition, a small number of MPs have experience in the arts and culture sector and the engineering industry. Two MPs were previously journalists.

A high number of the MPs interviewed for this report alluded to how their previous career has been helpful to them since becoming an MP. Those with professional backgrounds in education valued the links they had developed with students, parents and local communities, and how these relationships allowed MPs to be aware of the needs and interests of the people. Relations with local associations, political parties and religious groups were also viewed as being beneficial to the work of new MPs. Those with knowledge and experience of banking, finance and economics found these backgrounds to be useful in relation to the more detailed (committee) work of parliament.



## Previous Political Experience of Myanmar MPs

Parliaments around the world tend to be inhabited by large numbers of MPs who have previously had experience of elected office in other, often local settings. Given Myanmar's recent political history, this is not a feature of the current membership of the national parliament. The vast majority of Myanmar MPs are effectively first-time MPs, new to the practice of democratic politics and unfamiliar with the demands and rigours of parliamentary life.

*I gained political knowledge after becoming an NLD member.*

Serving a newly created democratic institution poses immense challenges for MPs. No institutional memory exists, and new MPs cannot learn from more established colleagues. Politicians face a steep learning curve in seeking to operationalise an effective institution and so consolidate its very existence. However, despite an absence of direct political experience, MPs have been able to draw on other experiences to inform their work as parliamentarians. Earlier professional careers, political party membership, previous involvement with the local community and with religious groups, have aided MPs in their work as parliamentarians. In particular, military training and political party membership have been useful learning environments for some MPs:

Experience in the education field was also judged by many MPs to be a helpful training ground for parliamentary life. Former teachers underlined the importance of having proximity to local communities. It is an important way for MPs to know the needs and interests of their constituents and to represent these in the parliament. A high number of MPs from a variety of career backgrounds stressed the importance of communication skills, including the ability to talk and listen to communities and constituents. It is clear that for Myanmar MPs, the ability to communicate effectively is seen as a key skill and one which involves both the transmission and receipt of information.

*The USDP party provided some training.*

Effective communication involves acquiring, sharing and transmitting information – a process which in turn shapes legitimate dialogue and discourse, and enables appropriate decision-making. 65% of Myanmar MPs identify 'access to information' as being 'somewhat' or 'very important'. Interestingly, the larger parties, including USDP and NLD, are most vociferous in noting the importance of 'access to information' (International IDEA and the Parliamentary Centre 2015, p. 2). This reflects an acknowledgement that MPs play a leading role in creating an atmosphere of openness and transparency which enables parliament to function effectively.

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