Leadership Through Women’s Unions

At the community level, the project is shaped and led by women’s unions established in participating villages. These women’s unions advise on community needs, act as peer educators and lead the implementation of project activities in partnership with CPI and BTD. This approach supports women’s leadership in these communities and contributes to project continuity, sustainability and impact.
Social factors and poor living conditions negatively impact the health status of communities.

**PROBLEM**

**STRATEGY**

Establish and support women’s unions to lead sustainable development to improve the social determinants of health.

**ACTIVITIES**

- Organize women’s unions and empower women in community leadership
- Organic farming training
- Microloans for small business, crop cultivation and livestock rearing (pigs and ducks)
- Promote local business
- Revolving fund for social welfare and community development

**OUTCOMES**

1. Empowered women leading community development
2. Improved socioeconomic status of households through access to livelihood opportunities
3. Improved living conditions, healthier lifestyles and a transition to organic farming
4. Improvement in social determinants of health leading to improved health status of communities

**OUTPUTS**

- Establishment of and support to women’s unions to lead sustainable development initiatives
- Organic farming and good agricultural practices
- Increased family income through initiation and expansion of women-led businesses
- Women’s union funding to sustain livelihood activities
- Reinvestment into community development activities

**OUTCOMES**

- Improved health literacy and promoted healthy behaviors
- Access to affordable drinking water filters and clean cookstoves
- Footbridge construction
- WASH facility construction
- Access to affordable solar lights and cookstoves

**OUTCOMES**

- Improved health literacy and promoted healthy behaviors
- Decreased diarrhea and respiratory tract diseases
- Access to primary education

**OUTCOMES**

- Good transportation for referral and livelihood
- Infrastructure for healthy behaviors
- Quality materials for increased living standards

**OUTCOMES**

- Access to affordable solar lights and cookstoves

**SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT IN 25 REMOTE VILLAGES OF MAWLAMYINEGYUN TOWNSHIP, AYEYARWADY REGION**
**Growth and Sustainability**

The project launched in 2018 with women’s union’s established in five villages. Over time, that has risen to 25 villages, covering a total population of 11,465 people. The 25 women’s unions comprise more than 1,000 women.

CPI and BTD designed and adapted project activities to be optimally sustainable, to effectively meet the priority needs identified by the communities, and to promote community ownership and self-sufficiency rather than dependency.

For example, commodities such as cookstoves and drinking water filters are provided to households at affordable prices rather than free. Construction projects, such as WASH facilities and footbridges, are carried out with community investment in the form of labor and in-kind donations. Support to sustain schools is shared between the project and beneficiary communities. Microloans are provided as “revolving funds” with interest payments rolled back into community projects.

**Impact**

The Better Homes, Better Lives project brings a holistic approach to community development in which activities are integrated so that impacts in one area bring sustainable benefits across the community. The flow diagram below provides an example of the impact model.

![Flow diagram showing the impact model](image-url)
## Summary of Key Impacts (2018 - 2022)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women's Unions Established</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households Supported with Community Services</td>
<td>1,001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Cookstoves Purchased by Households</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Water Filters Purchased by Households</td>
<td>409</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microloans Provided to Community Members for Agriculture and Livestock Projects</td>
<td>444</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businesses Supported to Launch and Expand through Microloans</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microloans and Interest Repaid in Full</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Supported to Complete Primary Education</td>
<td>662</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footbridges Constructed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Solar Lights Purchased by Households</td>
<td>850</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have seen big changes created by the women’s unions. Women want to join them because they see their potential and feel empowered to lead. The unions are providing microloans with the seed funds and using the interest earned to support community needs. If there is a funeral or sick person, or support is needed for children’s education, the women’s unions can often help. Two unions have been able to build footbridges. Now, community members actively tell me about their specific needs and request feedback. Men also are now asking to get involved and support community activities.

Solar lamps have made a real difference here. Schoolchildren can use them for studying. Farmers can use them to cook food before dawn. People can also charge their phones with them, which is very useful.

A lot has changed thanks to this project. In the past, we drank water from the river without filters. We risked many diseases. Now that we are using water filters we feel safer and there are very few cases of diarrhea.

“"I used the microloan from the women’s union to buy a new fishing net for my husband. I also started growing vegetables with the skills learned from the organic farming training. Our family eats them and I sell the surplus at the village market. This brings in enough income to cover our daily food expenses. So now my husband’s income can be used for other living expenses and for our children.”

We allocate the interest earned from the microloan project to support pregnant women, and we have also supported funeral expenses and other charitable needs. If we are able to earn more interest, we plan to build a preschool.

The outcomes of the Better Homes, Better Lives project clearly demonstrate the benefits of integrating health activities with wider social determinants and empowering women to lead change. The project has helped the communities to establish priorities and address them.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 military coup have created additional challenges for communities in Mawlamyinegyun. Many young women from the township working in Yangon lost their jobs and returned home. The Better Homes, Better Lives project is now focusing on income generation projects, providing sewing training and renting out sewing machines to help them establish small enterprises.

Following up on requests by the women’s unions, the Better Homes, Better Lives project is also looking at supporting several other new initiatives in 2022 and beyond:

• Provision of water pumps for rent at low cost to farmers to help them irrigate their fields.
• Provision of solar light sets to enable community members to have light throughout their homes.
• Provision of additional clean cookstoves to help families save money on fuel and cook more cleanly.