

CASE STUDY

BETTER HOMES, BETTER LIVES

Empowering Women-Led
Community Development in
Rural Myanmar (Burma)

May 2022



Watch the short video:

https://youtu.be/sc_EoWFAgAk



SCAN ME

Introduction

In 2018, Community Partners International (CPI) and local partner Baythitsadarna (BTD) launched the "Better Homes, Better Lives" pilot project to empower women to lead development in low-income rural communities in Ayeyarwady Region, southwest Myanmar (Burma). This low-lying region of Myanmar was devastated by Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Many villages still lack access to basic services including health care, education, clean water, sanitation and hygiene and electricity. Limited livelihood opportunities mean that many households face financial hardship.

Built on an existing maternal and child health initiative, the Better Homes, Better Lives project seeks to improve the health status of communities through sustainable investment in social determinants of health such as good health practices, nutrition access and quality, economic stability, education access and quality, and the physical environment. To date, the pilot project has focused on an expanding group of villages in Mawlamyinegyun Township.

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.



Theory of Change

PROBLEM

Social factors and poor living conditions negatively impact the health status of communities.



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

- Health, nutrition and WASH education
- Access to affordable drinking water filters and clean cookstoves

- Footbridge construction
- WASH facility construction
- Access to affordable solar lights and cookstoves

- School furniture
- Teacher stipends
- School stationery

OUTPUTS



Social and Community Context

- Establishment of and support to women's unions to lead sustainable development initiatives



Nutrition and Economic Stability

- 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



Health

- Improved health literacy and promoted healthy behaviors
- Decreased diarrhea and respiratory tract diseases



Physical Environment

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



Education Access and Quality

- Access to primary education

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

IMPACT



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.

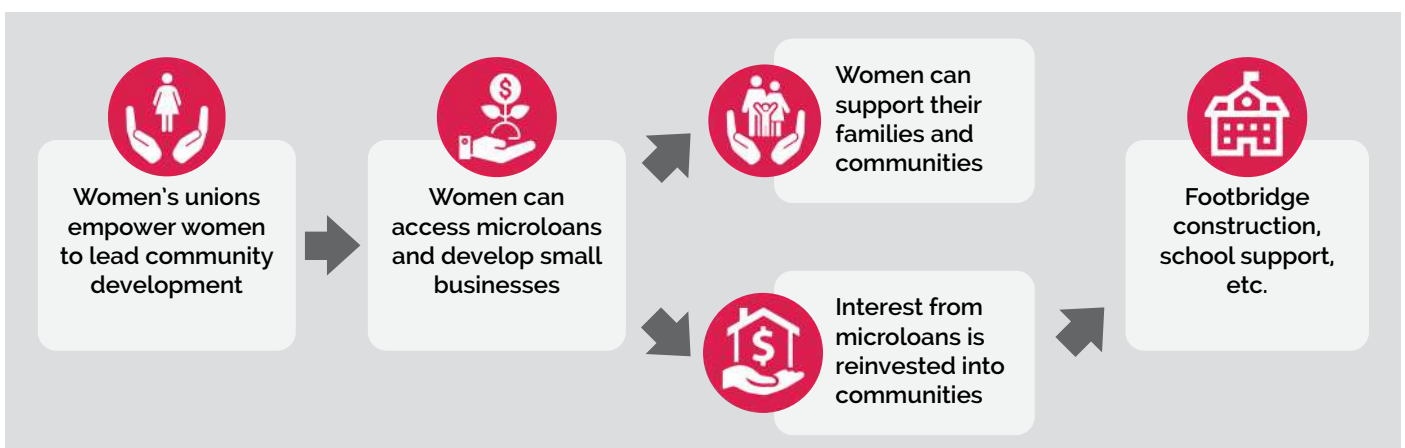
CPI and BTD designed and adapted project activities to be optimally sustainable, to effectively meet the priority needs identified by the communities, and to promote community ownership and self-sufficiency rather than dependency.

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.



Summary of Key Impacts (2018 - 2022)



25

women's unions established



1,140

women enrolled as women's union members



1,001

households supported with community services



3,290

community members supported with health and nutrition education



200

affordable cookstoves purchased by households



409

affordable water filters purchased by households



444

microloans provided to community members for agriculture and livestock projects



23

businesses supported to launch and expand through microloans



100%

of microloans and interest repaid in full



662

students supported to complete primary education



4

footbridges constructed



850

affordable solar lights purchased by households

Impact Testimonies



Daw Nwet Yin Win
Project Manager,
Bayhithsardana

“ 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. ”



Daw Hla Wine
Women’s union member,
Shwe Bo Su village



“ 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. ”



Daw Thin Thin Yu
Auxiliary midwife and women’s union
member, Kyaw Nu village

“ 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. ”

Daw Yin Shwe Aye
Women’s union member,
Kyaw Nu village



“ 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. ”

Daw Yin Shwe Aye
Women’s union member,
Kyaw Nu village



“ 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. ”

Looking to the Future

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.



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