

THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN ANTI-TRAFFICKING OF WOMAN AND GIRLS IN MYANMAR

Ei Ei Thae¹, Nyein Nyein Cho²

Abstract

Trafficking in persons (TiP) is a severe crime that infringes on the rights of trafficked victims and is a crucial issue for development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) address the root causes and underlying elements of trafficking, with a focus on Goals 5, 8, and 16. The implementation of the SDGs is crucial for combating trafficking. The study primarily examines the trafficking of women and girls as a type of abuse against them. This study intends to analyze methods to decrease trafficking in women and girls by utilizing the Sustainable Development Goals. The study is carried out using qualitative research approach. The major findings demonstrate how the SDGs are interconnected in reducing the trafficking of women and children, emphasizing the areas where Myanmar incorporates the SDGs in its strategic goals. It highlights the difficulties of coordinating national initiatives with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study highlights the important role of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in combating the trafficking of women and girls as a form of violence against women. It also aims to conduct further research to help make real advancements in ending the trafficking of women and girls in Myanmar while promoting wider sustainable development goals. This study is important because it contributes to the discussion on sustainable development frameworks aimed at eradicating the trafficking of women and girls in Myanmar.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), trafficking in persons (TiP), trafficker, trafficked victim, violence against women

Introduction

Trafficking in persons is a severe crime and involves the acts of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring or receiving persons through use of force, coercion or other means for the purpose of exploitation. The effective prevention of and response to trafficking in persons, especially women and children requires the implementation of a comprehensive approach that includes prevention of trafficked in persons, protection of and assistance to victims of trafficking in persons, prosecution of crimes of trafficking in persons, and partnership against trafficking in persons.³ When trafficking in persons concerns women and girls, it is also considered as violence against women, and as such, responses to trafficking must be connected to the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals relating to the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.⁴

The study on anti-trafficking of women and girls is conducted from the perspectives of trafficked victims of women and girls, violence against women and sustainable development. It aims to highlight the efforts to address the gender dimensions of trafficking, with a special focus on the connection between the trafficking in women and violence against women.

¹ Department of Law, Naypyitaw State Academy

² Department of Law, Naypyitaw State Academy

³ United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, 2010.

⁴ Trafficking in Women and Girls, Report of the Secretary-General, A/73/263, p. 5.

Research Methods

The methods used in this study are the collection of data on trafficking of women and girls from the reliable internet sources, and the analysis of data to provide a global and national overview of anti-trafficking in women and girls.

Research Question

How do the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically the SDG Target 5.2, align with Myanmar's initiatives to address the trafficking of women and girls as a form of violence against women?

Trafficking in Women and Girls

Trafficking continues to be a gender-specific worldwide issue. Globally, female victims (women and girls) account for 60 percent of the total number of detected victims in 2020. With regard to forms of exploitation, female victims continue to be the most detected among those trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Nearly two-thirds of detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are women and another 27 percent are girls.¹

Connection between trafficking and gender-based violence

According to the most dependable figures from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), trafficking in persons primarily impacts women and girls. Furthermore, women and children are subjected to more brutality by traffickers.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) conducted content analysis of all the supplied court case summaries and elaborated a four-level scale of violence reported in the cases: (1) when the narrative explicitly mentioned that no violence was perpetrated against the victim, it was labelled “no violence”; (2) when the case reported the use of threats, retainment of passport and/or other forms of psychological violence to install fear in the victims, but not physical violence, it was labelled “threats or psychological violence”; (3) when the narrative reported physical segregation, beating or slapping the victim, it was labelled “explicit physical violence”; and (4) when the case reported sadistic or systemic violence, rape and sexual violence, it was labelled “extreme violence”.²

Analysis of the court case summaries collected by UNODC shows that traffickers use more violence with women and child victims, especially girls. Female victims are three-times more likely to suffer physical or extreme violence (including sexual violence) during trafficking than males. The same dataset shows that children (girls and boys) are 1.7 times more likely to suffer physical or extreme violence than adults (men and women), and girls are 1.5 times more likely to suffer violence than women.³

¹ UNODC, 2023, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2022), the United Nations, p. 25.

² UNODC, 2023, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2022): Collection of Court Case Summaries (2010-2020), the United Nations, footnote 16, p. 25.

³ Ibid.

As per analysis of the court case summaries, UNODC suggests the possible responses that increasing access to specialized care and services for victims who have suffered extreme violence, integrating gender-based violence interventions into anti-trafficking strategies, considering/including the use of explicit and extreme violence as an aggravating circumstance for the offence of trafficking in persons in national legislation, and integrating training of the judiciary to examine trafficking in persons as a form of gender-based violence within the context of international women's rights frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW).¹

There is significant evidence that gender-based violence (GBV) is a tool to control the trafficked victims. It is also a factor contributing to the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking. In 2019, globally, an estimated 245 million women and girls aged 15 years and older were subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner in the previous year.² The connection between intimate partner violence and trafficking is increasingly understood. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that in around 25 percent of cases, trafficking survivors were subjected to multiple forms of gender-based violence prior to being trafficked.³ The most recent data on detected trafficking victims also found that the intimate partner was the trafficker in 13 percent of cases. The broader patriarchal culture and social norms related to men's control of women's sexuality, and acceptance and justification of violence against women, are key underlying factors of women's vulnerability to trafficking.⁴

There are two major links between gender-based violence (GBV) and trafficking in persons (TiP):

- (1) Certain forms of TiP target or affect women and girls disproportionately and therefore constitute a form of GBV themselves. According to the UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, women make up 60 percent of detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation and most victims trafficked for the purpose of forced marriages are women and girls.
- (2) Among trafficked victims, there are often persons who experience different forms of GBV before, during or after the trafficking. This may include physical and mental abuse, including rape, deprivation of liberty or forced abortion by traffickers. It may also include violence, abuse and exploitation at the hands of persons not typically considered as 'professional' criminals but rather as members of the household where the victim ends up.⁵

Many of the trafficked victims around the world have faced both trafficking and gender-based violence (GBV). Therefore, the connection between trafficking in persons and gender-based violence cannot be ignored and must be effectively addressed.

Trafficking in women and girls: Violence against women and girls

Trafficking constitutes a violation of international law because it is contrary to the international prohibition on sex-based discrimination. A refinement of this position identifies

¹ UNODC, 2023, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2022), the United Nations, p. XII.

² United Nations, UN-Women and Women Count, Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: the Gender Snapshot, 2023, p. 10.

³ https://www.unodc.org/documents/human_trafficking/2020/final_Female_victims_of_trafficking_for_sexual_exploitation_as_defendants.pdf

⁴ Trafficking in women and girls: crises as a risk multiplier, Report of the Secretary-General, A/77/292.

⁵ UNODC, 2022, Quick Reference Guide for the Identification of Gender-Based Violence in Trafficked Persons, the United Nations Publication, p. 6.

trafficking as a form of violence against women and, therefore, a violation of the norm prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex.¹

With regard to violence against women, General Recommendation No. 19 on violence against women issued by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the General Assembly in 1993 are significant.

General Recommendation No. 19 brings the issue of violence against women within the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by stipulating that the definition of discrimination contained in article 1 includes gender-based violence, i.e., violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It makes specific reference to trafficking by identifying it as a form of violence against women that is incompatible with the equal enjoyment of rights by women and with the respect for their rights and dignity, putting women at special risk of violence and abuse.²

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) defines ‘violence against women’ as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women’.³ Since trafficking results in all these three kinds of harms, the declaration clearly lists trafficking as one of the forms of violence against women.

Additionally, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identifies trafficking as a form of violence against women. It recommend the detailed action to be taken by Member States against violence against women, including trafficking in women, in particular “appropriate measures to address the root factors, including external factors, that encourage trafficking in women and girls for prostitution and other forms of commercialized sex, forced marriages and forced labour in order to eliminate trafficking in women”.⁴

While trafficking is itself a form of violence against women, violence against women can also be a factor increasing vulnerability to trafficking. Women may also be more vulnerable than men to coercion and force at the recruitment stage, increasing their susceptibility to being trafficked in the first place.⁵

States (particularly countries of origin) can address increases in vulnerability to trafficking related to violence against women through practical measures that could include: providing safe shelter for women experiencing violence; setting up crisis hotlines; and establishing victim support centres equipped with medical, psychological and legal facilities. Longer term measures that seek to address the social, cultural and structural causes of violence are also important. These may include: reforming legislation that either discriminates against women or fails to address violence against women; ensuring the prompt investigation and prosecution of complaints related to violence against women; providing access to effective

¹ OHCHR, 2010, Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking Commentary, United Nations Publication, p. 39.

² Paragraph 13(b), General Comment on Article 6 of CEDAW, General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against women, 1992.

³ Article 1 of the United Nation Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993.

⁴ Paragraph 113(b), Strategic Objective and Action D, Chapter IV, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995 (A/ CONF.177/20).

⁵ OHCHR, 2010, Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking Commentary, United Nations Publication, p. 111.

remedies for gender-based violence; implementing education initiatives aimed at educating the public about violence against women and combating negative attitudes towards women; and training police, immigration, judicial and medical personnel and social workers on the sensitivities involved in cases of violence against women.¹

The trafficking of women and girls is a form of violence against women that impedes the social and economic development of communities and States, as well as the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals.²

Therefore, preventing and responding to trafficking of women and girls should be linked to the Sustainable Development Goals focused on eradicating all types of violence against women and girls.

Links between trafficking, violence against women and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The SDGs provide a framework for addressing the root causes of trafficking in persons and offer opportunities to connect with other global partnerships and initiatives to combat this issue. Out of the 17 SDGs, trafficking in persons is specifically mentioned in three targets under three goals: Goal 5 (gender equality), with target 5.2 seeking to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation, the indicator agreed to measure this target is 5.2.1 and 5.2.2; Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), with target 8.7 being to take immediate action and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, the indicator agreed to measure this target is 8.7.1; and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), with target 16.2 being to end abuse, exploitation and all forms of violence against and torture of children, the indicator agreed to measure this target is 16.2.2 (refer to Table 1).³

Table 1: The SDGs relevant to anti-trafficking in persons, especially women and girls⁴

Goals	Targets	Indicators
Goal 5. Gender Equality “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”	5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age
		5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence

¹ OHCHR, 2010, Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking Commentary, United Nations Publication, p. 111.

² Strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice responses to violence against women, General Assembly Resolution 65/228.

³ Trafficking in Women and Girls, Report of the Secretary-General, A/73/263, p. 5.

⁴ Global Indicator Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/71/313, E/CN.3/2018/2 and E/CN.3/2019/2, E/CN.3/2020/2.

Goals	Targets	Indicators
Goal 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”	8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms	8.7.1 Proportion and number of children aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age
Goal 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”	16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children	16.2.2 Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation

However, trafficking of women and girls is a multifaceted issue cutting across human rights, rule of law, migration, labour, inequality, anti-corruption, education, gender, violence, and conflict issues. Many of the root causes and underlying factors for the trafficking of women and girls are covered in the Sustainable Development Goals. They include gender-specific factors such as: the vulnerability of women to poverty, addressed in Goal 1; the limited access for women and girls to education, addressed in Sustainable Development Goal 4; and the acceptance and normalization of violence against women and girls, which is addressed in Goal 11. Broader socioeconomic factors also play a role, such as inequalities within and between countries, which is addressed in Goal 10, and insecurity as a result of conflict, addressed in Goal 16, or as a result of climate change and natural disasters, which is addressed in Goals 12, 13, 14 and 15. As such, the implementation of several Goals is critical to the elimination of trafficking in women and girls.

Anti-trafficking efforts of Myanmar: The 3Ps Paradigm

Myanmar serves as both the source and transfer location for human trafficking, with the primary destinations being China, Thailand, and Malaysia. The main types of trafficking in Myanmar were forced marriage, forced labor, and forced prostitution. In Myanmar, the primary reason driving human trafficking is the increasing demand for employment possibilities. The traffickers successfully persuade the victims that they will secure respectable and well-paying jobs elsewhere. There seems an especially strong connection with the demand vacuum of other countries since domestic trafficking comprises only 19.68 per cent while transnational trafficking does 80.32 per cent (refer to Figure 1). In 2021, most detected victims of trafficking were women and made up 79.31 per cent. Out of the children trafficking, girls made up 71.43 percent.¹

¹ Central Body for Suppression of Trafficking in Persons (CBTIP), Ministry of Home Affairs, Annual Report of Anti-trafficking (2021), p. 64.

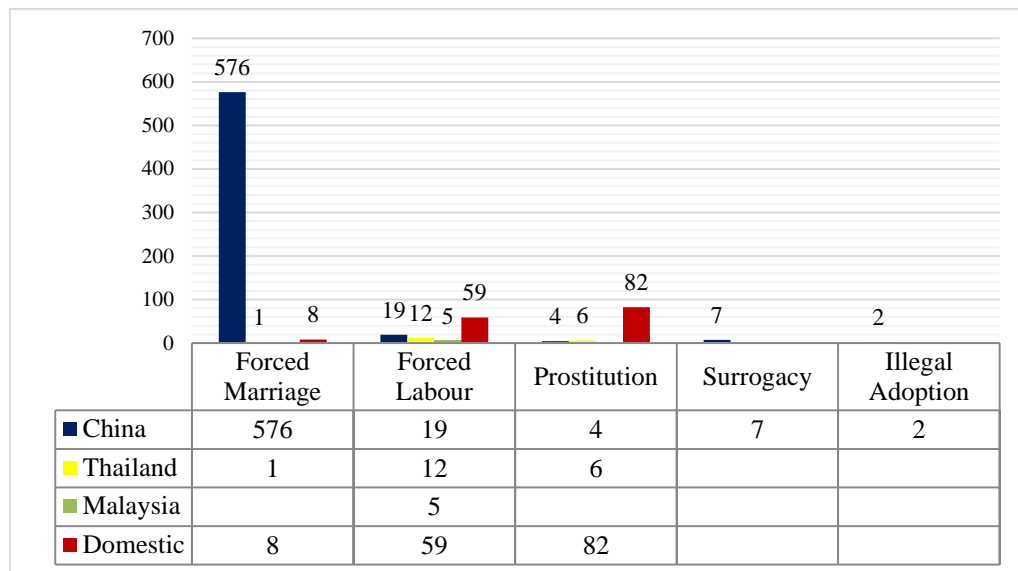


Figure 1: Patterns and Trends of Human Trafficking in Myanmar, 2017 - 2020 ¹

In 1995, Myanmar signed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which is a global blueprint for advancing women's rights through various actions including anti-human trafficking measures. As part of the commitments made under the Beijing Declaration, Myanmar adopted a National Plan of Action for Trafficking in Women and Children in 1997 followed by a Five-Year National Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking in 2007. Consequently, in 2004, Myanmar became a member state to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. In 2005, Myanmar adopted the first national legislation on anti-trafficking, the Anti- Trafficking in Persons Law in which acts of human trafficking are criminalized. In 2017, Myanmar had ratified the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. In 2022, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law (2005) is repealed by the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons Law. The new law criminalizes all forms of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, in line with the UN Trafficking Protocol and the ASEAN Trafficking Convention.² It contains the provisions relating to the criminalization of acts committed for the purpose of enabling trafficking such as document fraud, participation in an organised criminal group, disclosure of confidential information relating to the trafficking victim, obstruction of justice, and attempting or being an accomplice in the commission of human trafficking. Furthermore, it introduces the new penalty for the traffickers using internet and technology.³ With regard to trafficking in persons, the Central Body for Suppression of Trafficking in Persons (CBTIP) is the key agency in developing and implementing the Five-Year National Plans of Action to Combat Human Trafficking with the participation of the relevant ministries. Currently, community-based anti-trafficking task forces are organized to prevent and combat trafficking.⁴

¹ Data yearly issued by the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division of Myanmar Police Force.

² Section 3(b) of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons Law, 2022.

³ Section 43 of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons Law, 2022.

⁴ Chapter 5 of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons Law, 2022.

As regard protection of trafficked victims, the provisions relating to measures of trafficked victim protection such as non-punishment of trafficked victims, means for repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation of trafficked victims, and compensation for damage suffered by trafficked victims are mentioned in the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons Law of 2022. In giving assistance to victims of human trafficking, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement is the main agency. When exploited persons are rescued and are identified as victims, they are placed under protection in a shelter home of the Department of Rehabilitation. This department provides a two-week program of "rehabilitation" for most victims of trafficking returning from abroad. Providing basic needs and physical and mental care, are also being performed while temporarily receiving the victims of trafficking in persons in the shelters. In accordance with "National Standard Operating Procedures on Repatriation, Reintegration and Rehabilitation of Victims of Trafficking in Persons", providing travel expenses, medical care and food for victims of trafficking, and supporting individual needs for rehabilitation are being implemented.

The role of prevention is vital in addressing human trafficking. As an origin country for human trafficking, interventions focus primarily on prevention, including awareness raising and vulnerability reduction. Regarding the awareness-raising activities on anti-trafficking in persons and on the risks of human trafficking, preventive activities such as distributing pamphlets, erecting billboards and posters, conducting training and talks, broadcasting educational stories through multi-media, and putting stickers on the passenger buses and at the highway bus stations; sending public information via SMS through telephone operators; and at the basic education level, teaching the knowledge relating to human trafficking in the life skills subject are being carried out.

Alignment between anti-trafficking efforts of Myanmar and the SDGs

Although efforts to prevent trafficking mainly focus on awareness-raising and information-sharing, more emphasis is needed on tackling the root causes of trafficking and on preventing trafficking as an integral part of Myanmar's implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Myanmar has been in the process of reforms that are in line with the Five-Point Road Map and nine objectives of the State Administration Council. Among the priorities in the process of reforms, the balance between economic development, social development and environmental protection is the priority. The following table illustrates the alignment between the SDGs and their respective targets with the strategies and action plans outlined in the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (MSDP) (2018-2030) related to anti-trafficking.

Table 2: The alignment between MSDP¹ and the SDG Target 5.2, with a focus on anti-trafficking

Pillar	Goal	Strategy	Action Plan	Strategic Outcome	Relevant Agencies	Relevant SDG Target
3 People and Planet	4 Human resource s and social develop ment for a 21 st century society	4.1 Improve equitable access to high quality lifelong educational opportunities	4.1.2 Eliminate abuse, discrimination, and exploitation faced by young people, including girls and other vulnerable groups, in all educational environments	All children have access to, progress through and successfully complete a quality basic education	MoEDU, MoSWRR	SDG 5.2
		4.3 Expand an adaptive and systems based social safety net and extend social protection services throughout the life cycle	4.3.5 Introduce programmes and services to prevent and punish human trafficking	Children and young people have services to protect them against risk and support their development	MoSWRR, MMCWA, MoALL, MoLIP, MoHA	SDG 5.2

In order to combat human trafficking, one of the best ways to do that is to align anti-trafficking efforts with the UN SDGs. The above alignment demonstrates the concerted efforts and targeted strategies outlined in Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan to address the multifaceted issue of trafficking, recognizing its intersection with the SDGS relevant to counter-trafficking.

Implementation of the SDG Target 5.2 in Myanmar

The trafficking of women and girls is a form of violence against women, and as such, responses to trafficking must be connected to the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals relating to the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, SDG 5, Target 5.2. Under The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023, insufficient progress has been made in reducing intimate partner violence over the past two decades. Despite growing global awareness and evidence on effective prevention strategies, rates of violence against women were reported to

¹ Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (2018 – 2030), 2018, Ministry of Planning and Finance, Myanmar, pp. 13, 28 and 46; A Monitoring Framework against the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (MSDP), 2021, the Central Statistical Organization (CSO), Ministry of Planning and Finance, Myanmar, pp. 10, 25 and 41.

have increased. It is need to pass laws and put in place emergency response plans that prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls, both online and offline, by 2030.

The United Nations states that gender-based violence is a silent emergency in Myanmar.¹ Myanmar Demographic and Health Survey (2015-2016) highlights that 15 percent of women have experienced physical violence since age 15 and 3 percent have ever experienced sexual violence. 3 percent of ever-pregnant women report having experienced physical violence during any pregnancy. 21 percent of ever-married women have experienced spousal violence; the most common type of spousal violence is physical violence (15 percent), followed by emotional violence (14 percent). Only 3 percent of ever-married women have ever experienced spousal sexual violence. 37 percent of ever-married women who have experienced spousal violence report suffering physical injuries, including 7 percent who have had serious injuries such as deep wounds, broken bones, and broken teeth. Only 22 percent of women who have experienced physical or sexual violence committed by anyone have sought help to stop the violence, and 37 percent have never told anyone about the violence.²

The MDHS (2015-2016) indicates that 51 percent of women and 49 percent of men held that a husband would be justified in beating his wife in certain circumstances.³ Culturally, wife beating is still not widely believed to be a social problem in Myanmar. As recognized by the General Assembly, violence against women is often embedded in and supported by social values, cultural patterns and practices.⁴

It is therefore essential that States must comply with international commitments when addressing violence against women. Myanmar is a signatory to the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997. In doing so, Myanmar agreed to develop law to implement it. In signing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, Myanmar also agreed to end violence against both girls and boys. The 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women is a significant global standard that Myanmar as a UN member state should adhere to. These norms were further advanced by the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, through which States agreed 12 priorities to accelerate progress to implement CEDAW. At the regional level, Myanmar signed the 2004 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.⁵

Following the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), Myanmar National Committee on Women (MNCW) (previously named Myanmar National Committee of Women's Affairs - MNCWA) was established on 3 July 1996 as a national mechanism chaired by the Union Minister for the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement for inter-ministerial cooperation and the implementation on women development programmes in order to integrate women rights and gender issues into government policy. In 2013, the MNCWA developed the

¹ www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/Justice_Base-2016-04-22-Women_in_Myanmar-Plural_legal_systems.pdf.

² Ministry of Health and Sports (MoHS) and ICF, 2017, Myanmar Demographic and Health Survey 2015-16, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, and Rockville, Maryland USA: Ministry of Health and Sports and ICF, p. 261.

³ <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR324/FR324.pdf>.

⁴ General Assembly Resolution 65/228.

⁵ Cate Buchanan, 2022, "Preventing Gender-Based Violence in Myanmar", Constitution Assessment for Women's Equality Series No. 3, p. 4.

National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) (2013–2022), in which violence against women was listed as one of the twelve priority areas.¹

Myanmar upholds the zero-tolerance policy against any form of sexual violence. Myanmar signed Joint Communiqué on Prevention and Response to Conflict Related Sexual Violence on December, 2018. To implement this Joint communiqué, the National Committee on Prevention and Response to Violence against Women in Conflict and its working committee are organized. In June 2020, this committee's name have been changed to the National Committee on Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and its working committee to overall response all forms of sexual violence. With the lead of the State Administrative Council, the working committee of Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence was reorganized and it is undertaken to approve the action plan.²

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement is drafting the Prevention and Protection on Violence against Women Law to effectively protect women and girls from all forms of violence including sexual violence. Moreover, the Prostitution law is being drafted to protect the sex workers from being exploited and to achieve the equal rights in access to health care services in cooperation with the relevant ministries, non-governmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations and CSOs.³ Prostitutes are especially vulnerable to violence because their unlawful status tends to marginalize them. They need the equal protection of laws against rape and other forms of violence.⁴

The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) carries out strengthening gender equality and protection programmes for vulnerable groups with prevention, protection and responses approaches. As the prevention activities, DSW conducts the GBV awareness activities such as '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' which is an international campaign, and takes place each year and runs from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December (Human Rights Day). DSW conducts '24 hours Helpline Service' started from November 2016 for the protection and response of the gender-based violence against women. DSW has assigned well-trained DSW Case Managers in States and Regions including Naypyitaw Union Territory and provides services in order to respond the complaints systematically. Besides, DSW sets up 'One Stop Women Support Center - OSWSC' in Yangon, Mandalay, Mawlamyine, Laishio, Loikaw, Monywa and Sittwe for women and girls survivors affected by violence. These centers provide shelter, health care, legal aid, psychosocial support, vocational training, cash support and reintegration into community.⁵

To reach the SDG Target 5.2, Myanmar is working to improve the protection of violence against women and girls by monitoring the violence against women and girls by collecting data on the survivors. The following table shows the gender-based violence handled by the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) during 2017 and 2023 (November).

Table 3: Record of Gender-Based Violence (2017-2023, November)⁶

¹ Ibid, p. 5.

² <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Myanmar.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ OHCHR, 2010, Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking Commentary, United Nations Publication, p. 41.

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Myanmar.pdf>

⁶ Data on gender-based violence issued by the Department of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of Myanmar.

No	Year	Rape for girls under 16 years of age	Rape for women over 16 years of age	Attempt to rape for girls under 16 years of age	Attempt to rape for women over 16 years of age	Sexual Harassment and assault	Domestic Violence	Other	Total
1	2017	113	7	3	-	13	61	49	246
2	2018	330	42	38	-	31	114	60	615
3	2019	442	65	18	3	-	31	99	658
4	2020	407	72	19	3	16	171	137	825
5	2021	162	29	7	10	-	64	31	303
6	2022	230	38	-	-	7	32	31	338
7	2023 (November)	95	17	-	7	14	76	69	278
	Total	1779	270	85	23	81	549	476	3263

The crime can be prevented by identifying and reducing the risk factors, and identifying and increasing the protection factors that help shield a person from the crime.¹ In anti-trafficking of women and girls, it is necessary to observe the victimisation of human trafficking created by a combination of violence and gender-based discrimination that worsens the vulnerability of a woman or girl in an economic and social plight. It is recognized that human trafficking and GBV are interrelated issues that must be tackled together, and the comprehensive efforts to prevent and respond to human trafficking include the efforts to prevent and respond to GBV.² The efforts to combat human trafficking will be strengthened by passing the Prevention of Violence against Women Law.

On the other hand, proper message in public awareness campaigns is an important component. Men and boys can play as agents of change in addressing the harmful impact of gender stereotypes and negative social norms and in preventing violence against women and human trafficking, and it is need to educate and engage men and boys for this purpose.³ Women and girls victims of human trafficking, owing to pervasive and persistent gender equality, are further disadvantaged and marginalized by a general lack of information on or awareness and recognition of their human rights and by the stigmatization often associated with human trafficking, as well as by the obstacle they meet in gaining access to accurate information and recourse mechanism in cases of the violations and abuses of their rights. Therefore, special measures are required for their protection and to increase their awareness.⁴

The Sustainable Development Goal 5, with target 5.2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development refers to trafficking in women and girls as a form of violence against women. Violence against women and girls takes many forms, including physical, sexual, psychological,

¹ <https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/en/education/tertiary/organized-crime/module-12/key-issues/key-crime-prevention-typologies.html>

² Shujiro Urata, Kazuo Kuroda and Yoshiko Tonegawa, 2023, "Sustainable Development Disciplines for Humanity", Springer, p. 141.

³ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 2018, A/RES/73/146.

⁴ Ibid.

and economic. It occurs in many settings, including home, school, community and over the Internet. Similarly, a wide range of perpetrators commit violence against women and girls, such as family members, intimate partners, and strangers. Such violence not only inflicts harm, pain and humiliation on women and girls but also kills them. Without addressing violence against women and girls, the relevant SDGs targets for counter-trafficking of women and girls cannot be achieved.

Findings

Myanmar has integrated its action plan to prevent and respond to trafficking into the MSDP. Myanmar's action plan aims to establish an adaptive social safety net by introducing programs and services to prevent and punish human trafficking, aligning with the goal of ensuring children and young people have protective services and developmental support. Aligned with Sustainable Development Goal Target 5.2, another pertinent initiative aims to eradicate abuse, discrimination, and exploitation experienced by young individuals, particularly girls and other susceptible groups, in educational settings. The goal is to ensure that all children can access, advance in, and effectively complete a high-quality primary education.

Recommendations

The life skills subject at the basic education level which includes the basic skills that will enable people to adapt to social life according to their age should be taught effectively. The use of explicit and extreme violence should be considered or included as an aggravating circumstance for the offence of trafficking in persons in national anti-trafficking legislation. And the Prevention and Protection of Violence Against Women Law need to pass without delay.

Conclusion

Trafficking in persons, especially women and girls, is a persistent challenge in Myanmar. It is characterized by the violation of the right of survivors to a life free from coercion, abuse and violence. Myanmar women and girls face particularly marginalization, due to gender gaps in access to education, economic inequality, insecurity compounded by decent work deficits and limited access to social protection, prevalent and persistent violence and abuse. As a result, women and girls are at heightened risk of being trafficked into some of the most exploitative situations. It is evident that efforts to tackle the causes of trafficking and respond to emerging challenges are increasingly critical to ensure that intersecting gendered inequalities do not continue to leave the most marginalized behind.

The commitment to leaving no one behind in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is particularly important for the elimination of trafficking in women and girls. The trafficking of women and girls is a form of violence against women, and therefore, the responses to trafficking must be connected to the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals relating to the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. As such, all women and girls live a life free from violence including trafficking.

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