## 

Basic Understanding of Self Help Group




## World Vision

FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

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## Foreward

Action Aid Myanmar is an international organization working with local partners and community volunteers, Fellows, towards reducing poverty and inequality. Founded in 1972, with the head office located in South Africa and 50 global country offices, ActionAid gives development assistance to impoverished people in developing countries.

This book aims to share the success of community youth Fellows, women self-help Community Based Organisations (hereafter referred to as CBOs) and field staff working together; as well as the important of self-help groups and technical knowledge.

The primary of aim of this book is to show the importance of likeminded community members working together and succeeding together. It includes the initial stages of the Self-Help Group, overcoming challenges and successfully case study. This book will be more useful at practical level as it includes fieldwork and the process of establishing Self-Help Group experiences.

## Preface

This book is intended for existing members, potential members and people who are interested in this group to understand how and why a 'Self Help Group' is established. It includes information on how loans will be available for typical housewives from low-income families to give them a gateway to starting a small business. It also covers how these women can learn to work in groups, be able to manage their businesses efficiently and develop the ability to lead other people by participating in the establishment of the 'Self Help Group'.

This book is divided into 5 sections, and each section lays out the actions to be taken for the successful growth of the group. It illustrates the actions and the expected hardship and difficulties in Part 2, 3 and 4 while the part 5 expresses the visible changes in the group members' ideological characteristics and attitudes.

The recommendations for the progress and the plan are represented in each part. The required time frame for establishing 'Self Help Group' is also recommended.

The feelings and actual experiences of the leaders, supporters and participators from "Women Self Help Groups" are also included at the end of this book.

This book has been published based on the people's experiences in participating in Self Help Groups and the experiences of other participants in other volunteering groups.

## 1. Introduction

These groups are established and managed by women who have been supported by ActionAid Myanmar, an organisation which was formed to support vulnerable families from ruralvillages to help them find a way to establish long term professions and businesses. This program is part of a long term project of ActionAid Myanmar according to the Village Book, which has been written by villagers to analyze the village's economy and the situation of vulnerable rural families.

These groups develop quickly and are capable of helping each other because of the guideance of Fellows and Village Development Youth, who are highly trained in basic accounting and the qualities of of the Self Help Group.

## Part (1)

## Beginning stage

## (a) Activities

- Help vulnerable families from the Village Book to get into the habit of saving money for theirlong-term livelihood, encourage these families to found Self Help Groups. In addition, get agreement from the village authorities by asking them to support the most vulnerable families.
- Make a list of appropriate members who should participate in this Self Help Group according to the opinions of village authorities and speak persons.
- Gather villagers to attend a meeting which will explain them how the Self Help Group will support them in providing a sustainable livelihood.
- Choose enthusiastic people who are appropriate for theSelf Help Group and explain the basic knowledge of the Self Help Group, and invite them to cooperate.
- Fellows, Village Development Youth and enthusiastic women will cooperate to explain to potential members who are women from vulnerable families the basic characteristics of a Self Help Group and the benefits of saving money efficiently, and also encourage them to participate.
- Enthusiastic women members and fellow, Village Development Youth, members can collect money from potential members.



## (b) What is a Self Help Group?

- A Self Help Group is the collaboration of economically underdeveloped people who share similar ambitions
- Members will have access to loans with low interest rates when they need financial support to provide for their own long-term livelihood by saving money regularly
- The group's rules are imposed, encouraging the women to participate for the development of their village
- The group should have a limited numbers of members (minimum 10 to maximum 25)
- The group can be either registered or unregistered


## The advantages of saving money regularly

- Saving money regularly is the key to financial security
- It can be used in an emergency
- People can get capital to use for their businesses, or to boost their income when the savings accumulate
- Saving can make people feel happy and encourage them to save more
- All the family members from the community don't need to save money
- Only women of similar social and economical background should participate


## Part (2) <br> Planning Stage

## (a) Expected Challenges

- To find people who have low confidence in saving money
- To find people who are uncomfortable with group participation
- To find families who have more than one member who would like to participate to
- The influence of the village authorities
- To encounter people who participate for the benefit of other members and not for themselves (i.e. encouraging enthusiastic members)


## (b) Activities

- The Fellows, Village Development Youth, members encourage people to conduct meetings
- Conduct regular meetings
- Suggest regular meetings and to save money
- Identify a specific date to hold meetings and during that meeting decide the member's saving amount
- The Fellows, Village Development Youth, should have a constitution


## (c) Explanation of savings

- Saving is a part of a person'swhich is money, property or objects of value that are set aside and not used immediately
- Savings are money left specifically for use in the future to provide security or for some intention or ambition.


## The Habit of Saving

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Income - expenditure = Saving
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## Appropriate method for saving

Income - Saving = Expenditure
(It is good to adopt the habit of leaving the saving from your income.)

## "One Scoop of rice"

Myanmar families have the tradition of saving money by leaving one scoop of rice before they cook to eat to donate later. It can be a huge help to support one's own professions and businesses by applying this tradition to income, but instead of donating it, you save it for the future.

## Saving and Saving Plan

Everyone has the desire to save money. However, most of the people are not hesitating to save money but to manage the savings using a plan. Following objectivesare essential in a saving plan.

- The intention (objective) of saved money
- The amount to save for each period
- When to save (When should we save money?)
- Where to save (Where should we save money?)
- The period to save (For how long will we save?)
- With whom to save? (Save money individually or with others?)

It is very important to explain clearly that everyone can save by asking the question "is every one able to save money?" It is important to remember that it's difficult to save money keep it at their houses for vulnerable families. It is also important to remind these families that saving money by collaborating with each other means there is a better chance of success.

## 2. Part 3

## The Challenging Stage

## (a) Expected challenges

- There will be no serious thought on selecting the leader of the group, or no desire to accept the responsibility of a leader
- Complaints on saving money long-term
- Drop outs
- Internal disputes
- Some members asking for more loan funds
- Not being punctual at meetings and being absent from meetings
- Influencing factors of enthusiastic people who cooperated with the fFellows, Village Development Youth andmembers
- Members not willing to discuss with each other during the meetings


## (b) Activities

- Limiting the number of members
- Having a constitution and election of leaders according to the protocol
- Decide the interest rate, returning method for loan and the period of loan and borrowing
- The Fellows, Village Development Youth should help with keeping accounts and records
- Setting rules to address the problem of being absent and late for meetings
- The Fellows and Village Development Youth suggest assigning responsibilities for the leaders and members
- The Fellows and Village Development Youth suggest laying out the objectives of the group and set procedures according to the tasks


## (c) The structure of Self Help Group

1. Leader (1)
2. Leader (2)
3. Accountant
4. The one who's responsible for vault
5. The one who's responsible for vault's key
(The leader should be elected openly according to the members opinion and the election should be held every year.)

## Duties and Responsibilities

1. There should be a clear instruction on the duties and responsibilities of leader (1), leader (2), accountant, the one who's responsible for vault and the one who's responsible for vault's key.
2. The duties and responsibilities of each person above should be written clearly.

## (d) Explanation on basic facts of loan

## 1. The amount of loan

The amount of the loan should be set equally and fairly according to the financial status of the group and it should be enough to use as capital for a business. (There should be a minimum and maximum amount set if the group's financial background becomes stronger.)

## 2. The interest rate

The loan should be lower than the interest rate of the informal market while it will be a bit higher than government banks, (we should consider the inflation rate).

## 3. The collateral

The loan should be provided along with the assurance of two neighbors from the group.

## 4. The period for loan

The period should be set according to the borrower's will though it shouldn't be longer than 9 months.

## 5. The returning/pay back method for loan

The lowest interest rate is set for borrowers to be able to return the loan monthly. The returning method for a loan is usually set according to the borrower's will and the suggestions of other members. The borrower has to decide and represent a returning method for loan before the member can borrow and it must be recorded in the group's journals, (returning the loan regularly can lighten the weight of the loan.

## 6. The business intended for loan

The loan will be provided to increase the income of the family by helping them with their business, for education or health problems. The loan has to be represented to the group before the member can actually borrow and it will be recorded in group's journals.

## Part 4

## Going Strong Stage

## (a) Expected challenges

- Not being able to keep the promise of returning the loan
- Arguments due to colleting fines of the people who are late for meetings
- Dissatisfaction due to wanting a loan
- Weak cooperation between members and weak discussion
(b) Activities
- Discussing terms and conditions on loan (the amount of the loan, interest rate, period for loan, returning method, collateral)
- Make a plan on how to lend money according to priorities if demand for a loan is more than the available funds
- Discuss and set the responsibilities of the leaders and the members
- Setting a fixed date, time and place for the meetings, deciding the rules to follow when attending a meeting and increasing people attending the meetings
- The Fellows and Village Development Youth suggest setting penalties for abusing the rules and conditions
- The Fellows and Village Development Youth suggest members submit a form for loans and describe a business plan with what they plan to use the loan for
- The accountant of the Self Help Group to be able to do accounts with the help of the Fellows and the Village Development Youth.
- The person who is in charge of inspecting the accounts will also be able to check the accounts properly with the help of the Fellows and theVillage Development Youth.
- Presenting financial statement in every meeting
- The Fellows and the Village Development Youth, suggest a business as an investment for the Self Help Groupand make a plan to establish it properly
- The Fellows and the Village Development Youth, suggest leaving a separate fund for the emergency health issue of the members


## (c) Setting rules and the actions which will be taken for disobeying them

These are the following conditions that detail the actions which will be taken when the rules are disobeyed. It is essential to lay out the rules and decide the penalties

1. Quitting the group
2. Regarding saving
3. Regarding loans
4. Prioritized conditions for getting a loan
5. Regarding the meetings
6. Using the emergency fund and helping the development of the village
7. Financial accounts, records and regarding to using the finances
8. Plans for dividing the dividends or profits
(PS. Rules are not for making members uncomfortable but for only making the group successful.)

## Part 5

## Stable and ongoing stage

(a) The benefits of struggling and establishing the Self Help Group

- Holding meetings regularly, letting one of the leaders know if a member has viable reasons for not being able to attend the meeting
- Members motivate each other to save money regularly and encourage the return of the loan according to the plan
- Form a mutual respect between the leaders and the members
- Discuss and cooperate with people who have same business
- Participating more actively in village matters
- Getting invitations from the authorities of the village to lead and participate in villagematters
- Motivate non-member women from the village to form and participate in theSelf Help Group
(b) Activities

The following 'guide book of self help group's rules' are decided and written according to all members' opinions. The book will be provided for all members.

1. The objective of the group
2. Deciding the number of the group members and procedure for quitting the group
3. The structure of the group, the length of stay of the leaders and their responsibilities
4. Savings, loans, the prioritized loan plan and setting rules for the meetings
5. The penalties which will be given for abusing the rules

- Leaving a separate fund for the members' emergency health problems and using them properly according to the rules and conditions
- Establishing a business as the group's investment with the decision of all members, make a proper plan and establishing it
- Make a plan to help and support the prosperity of the village, volunteering and the development of the village as theSelf Help Group
- The group's responsible members record all financial accounts and statements and check them regularly
- All tasks of the group should be handled properly and responsibly in every meeting
- Cooperating with other groups from the village or outside the village


## (c) The business plan of theSelf Help Group's businesses

Following topics should be discussed widely and repeatedly by all the members to get a final realistic plan.

1. What kind of business should we do?
2. Who will lead it?
3. When will we start it? In which period will we do it?
4. Whom should we ask for help? With whom should we cooperate?
5. Where can we get the raw materials? How should we transport them?
6. Do we have enough technology for that?
7. How do we make marketable products?
8. Where should we sell? How do we transport these products to the market?
9. How to boost our sale? What should we do to get reasonable prices for our products?
10. What are the expected loss and challenges? How do we overcome them?
11. Estimated funding to establish the business and expected profits for it

## 8 The characteristics of the "Self Help Group"

Take turns on leading responsibilities

Plans to help develop the village


Holding meetings regularly

Saving money

People with same opinions participate with their own will
9. The required time for establishing Self Help Group

| Stage | Estimated time | Remark |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| Beginning Stage | 3 months | The duration can be <br> shortened or <br> lengthened according <br> to the facilitator and <br> members wishes. |
| Planning Stage | 3 months | 6 months |
| Challenging Stage | 6 months |  |
| Going Strong Stage | $===$ |  |
| Stable and Ongoing Stage |  |  |



## 10. The ideal characteristics and the attitudes of the Self Help Group members

- A desire to solve and cooperate together on same problems
- Similar or equal financial and social standard, mutual respect and trust
- Accepting of other people's opinions
- Desire to cooperate within groups
- Desire to help each other, desire to help other non-member's challengesand situations
- No selfishness
- Desire to show individual ability and willing to cooperate with group
- Willingness to take responsibility for each other regarding to financial matters
- Willingness to divide tasks and duties of the group
- Willingness to take responsibility on group
- Enthusiasm in meetings.



## 11. Analyzing the Self Help Group

The conditions (i.e. success or failure) of a Self Help Group"can be determined by the results of analysis on the following subjects. These are the conditions of the analysis of the successful and the unsuccessful Self Help Groups.

| Analyzed sector | The result on analysis |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Successful group | Unsuccessful group |
| 1. Holding the meeting | The meeting is set up twice a month on fixed date, time and place. If meetings can't be held according to the plan, a substitute meeting will be held on a convenient date. | Meeting isn't held regularly and only on some convenient circumstances |
| 2. the percentage of members' meeting attendance | More than $90 \%$ of members regularly attend | Only under 60\% of members regularly attend |
| 3. Having rules and regulations and the percentage of awareness and following them | All the rules and regulations are recorded properly and all the members are well aware of them. There are penalties for abusing the rules | There is no official record of rules and regulations although they are already discussed, most of the members aren't aware of them |
| 4. Keeping financial accounts and registers properly | All the financial accounts are registered and kept properly for each date until the last one, every member knows the financial situation and the condition of the group | There is no official record of financial accounts and registers |


| 5. All members <br> make a decision or set <br> a rule for some matter | All the members are able to <br> participate in discussing and <br> making a decision on <br> something | Only one or two influential <br> members make the <br> decisions |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| 6. Every member <br> is able to get the loan <br> properly and fairly | All the members already had <br> turns on having loans many <br> times, prioritized loans will <br> be provided according to the <br> needs of more vulnerable <br> families | All the members took the <br> loan evenly, there is no <br> priority for the emergency <br> needs of more vulnerable <br> families |
| 7. Members' <br> reasons for asking for <br> loans | Most of the members ask for <br> loans only to establish their <br> own business or for <br> expanding them | Most of the members ask <br> loans to make ends meet |
| 8. The conditions <br> on returning loan | All the members return the <br> loan regularly in every <br> meeting according to their <br> promise before the loan, <br> every member has the <br> understanding of their loan, <br> the loan returning condition <br> and their guarantor's loan <br> and loan returning condition | The loan and the interest is <br> returned only once at the <br> end of the loan period, the <br> returned loan is less than <br> $80 \%$ |
| 9. Expanding <br> group's fund/capital | Members' regular savings <br> increase, being able to lend <br> more than 90\% of the group's <br> capital, members run a <br> business together to expand <br> the group's income | No regular savings, interest <br> rate is too much lower than <br> other informal businesses, <br> not returning the loan <br> properly |


| 10. Knowledge and <br> Technology | All the members share the <br> knowledge and technology <br> know how, experiences and <br> use them practically | Members don't know how to <br> get new knowledge and <br> technology and aren't aware <br> of it |
| :--- | :--- | :--- |
| 11. Cooperation <br> and codependence <br> between each other | All the members help and <br> depend on each other, <br> support and help other non- <br> members | There is no cooperation and <br> codependence between <br> members |
| 12. Setting an <br> ambition of the future <br> of the group | The group and each member <br> has an ambition for the <br> future and start to work for it | There is no discussion on <br> setting a future ambition |
| 13. Take turns on <br> leadership | Members take turns for the <br> leadership according to "Self <br> Help Group's Rules and <br> Regulations Guide Book" | Some responsible members <br> take more than one task |
| 14. The <br> development of <br> members' financial <br> situation | Members can invest more in <br> their businesses, <br> accumulation on assets, no <br> need to get a loan with very <br> high interest rate from other <br> third party associations, <br> sustainable livelihood for the <br> whole year | Most of the members can't <br> afford to send their children <br> to school, no sustainable <br> livelihood |
| $16 . \quad$ Well <br> cooperation and <br> linking between <br> members | Groups from the village and <br> the other groups and <br> associations from outer <br> village cooperate and work <br> together for the <br> development of the village | There is no cooperation with <br> any of the group or <br> association |
| 15. Members' <br> improvement on self- <br> confidence | Self Help Group members <br> participate for the prosperity <br> and the development of the <br> village | Self Help Group members <br> still hesitate to talk in front <br> of public audience |

## Conclusion

It is important to understand and accept that the development of nation, divisions and states, regions and villages is directly proportional to the strength and ability of regional volunteering groups and Self Help Groups. So it's essential to help these groups expand and support them to become stronger.

Self Help Groups will also be praised for helping not only members but also non members of the village to achieve a sustainable livelihood and also these activities will be recorded for their success.

It's not possible for these Self Help Groups to last long term without the help of the village authorities, influential people and all the community members. Everyone must come together to give positive suggestions and help these Self Help Groups to become a stronger and better organization so that they can also help support developing the village.

We'd like to acknowledge the effort of all those Self Help Group members and Fellow, Village Development Youth, and members for thinking and sharing their own actual experiences in order to contribute to this book.

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## 13. Appendices: Achievements of current Self Help Groups



Ma Phyu Phyu Win, Makyee Cho village

Cho Yadanar Self-Help Group was experiencing many difficulties in July, 2011. The group has been running smoothly for over 5 years. Ma Tin Tin Hlaing, a Self-Help Group member, shared her experience to Ma Phyu Phyu Win, the leader of the Self Help Group, "When the group was first founded, I borrowed 30000 Kyats from the group and bought a goat and bred it. Now the goat herd became 18 goats and when I sold them, I got 650000 Kyats. Now I'm buying a farmland with that money. It's all thanks to you and group. A memory of participating in this group". Ma Phyu Phyu Win said, "I was very happy for her words. I'm very grateful that everyone now gets many benefits from a group that I struggled alot to maintain."
"All Shwe Yay Ngan self-help members can now lead and decide everything like men. I'm very happy that, currently, most of the women from our village cooperate with each other strongly and have great interest in this group."

"I was at first a leader of a Self Help Group and as a leader; I had to remind all members to save money regularly, where we would hold meetings and decide the amount of money to save. I could only go back after the meeting was completely finished as a leader and I had to read rules and regulations to members at every meeting and encourage them to achieve our intention. The most important is to be patient with members, and to be selfless and to be patient for the long term establishment of the group. I got a lot of lessons and experiences on economical, social and general knowledge. I have high hopes for the future of this group."

Ma Myo Myo Chit,
Farmer,
So Pyin Village, Myaing Township.
"The INGO arrived to our Pha Lan Kan village, Ywar Tan Shay Quarter, southern Myaing Township in November, 2011. We founded a Self Help Group with 22 members with the encouragement and support of them. We named our group "The Light of the Unity" because we believe that we can achieve success through unity. We held regular meetings once a month, saved money, lent and borrowed money and returned the loan regularly. We set strict rules and regulations. I was the accountant of "The Light of the Unity" Self Help Group. I explained to the members about our group clearly and now I'm helping to develop the village and my society as a Self Help Group Member.

When I first participated in this group, I had no self confidence since I just depended on my husband and I spend most of my time with house chores. Now I'm a lot more confident and able to talk in public because of the regular attendance of AMM teachers. I now have my own saving piggy bank for the future. Yes, there's a little bit of arguments and different opinions since this is a group. However, I feel very happy since we always patched up after every little dispute.

When this group was first found, our intentions were to get a loan with lower interest rate from informal associations by saving money together as a group, to get much lower interest rates and to escape from the debt trap. However, now we get many achievements one after another and we are able to build our own business, and even established a business as an investment for the group. The biggest lesson I learned by participating in this group was there's no use walking towards the future without an ambitionm like a blind man trying to walk straight without being able to see anything."

Ma Mar Mar
Aung,
A farmer and SHG member Pha Lan Kan Village, Myaing

Township

## Nyaung Pin Thar Village, Groups of Mone Tine Village Quarter, Meikhtilar Township,

## Shin Than Chin Women's Self Help Group

Ma Pyae - I'm happy that our village's society is much developed because of the activities of this group.

Ma Htay - This group's existence encourages me a lot. Now we can help a lot more efficiently in all the village matters.

Ma War - The group can function and help easily if any member has financial difficulties. I feel a lot more secure since I can get a loan easily whenever I want.

Daw Khin Than Yi - I'm very delighted that our village now has electricity and students can study late at night.

## Ma May Thet

Htwe - It will be like a boat without paddle if a group is founded without any intention. So we need to set future goals in SHG.


Shin Than Chin omen's Self Help Group was founded in September, 2011. Ma May Thet Htwe, a member of fellow, Village Development Youth, and other 6 members from the Self Help Group had to go to every household in the village and explained and persuade them to join the Self Help Groups.
"We had to hold 6 meetings to found a Self Help Group. We had to explain several times that the group shouldn't be more than 20 members and can found a group depending on the amount of money they can save. A lot of people didn't understand how the groups work at first. They want to get a loan decided with a raffle. Now we get a loan with prioritized plans such as education and health matters. Ma Pyae, a member of SHG, said, "There were a lot of different opinions. We had to negotiate them for both parties to get satisfaction. Now everyone is of same mind and opinions. Ko Job and Ma May Thet from ActionAids also helped us when we didn't understand how accounting works."

First, we had to help a member who couldn't give birth easily. We now have the capital of 24lakh by saving 10000 kyats each month. We get a loan with $2 \%$ interest rate when we borrow.

As a group activity, we tried to give the village electricity by borrowing a generator from the monastery and using the dynamo which Action Aid provided us with. And then we didn't get electricity in the village about 3 months since the generator broke down frequently. Then we heard from the women's group that most of the students from the village had no more interest in studying and some of them completely stopped studying. So we, the Shin Than Chin Self Help Group used 380000 kyats from our capital as an initial investment. We could buy a new generator by asked for donations from the people who are working outer village. Now we women's SHG group can give the village electricity by leading and managing the tasks of asking for monthly electric bills and helping maintain the generator.

Now in 2016, we are renting tables and chairs as the group's business and our future goal is to establish a ranch as the group investment. We also have plans to help and support old and sick people from the village. We'd like to transform our group into a volunteering group in the future and we'd like to help with all the village's necessities. We'd like to support and help all people who have problems in health, education and livelihood.

## The Success of Self Help Groups

My name is Ye Kyaw Htet. I'm 26 years old and I live at Sharr Pin Kine village, groups of Sharr Pin Kine quarter, Pakhoteku Township. I worked as a Fellow, Village Development Youth, in CILPR Project which was the cooperation of ADRA Myanmar and ActionAids Myanmar between 2011 and 2013. The project included choosing people from families who has no farm or owned only a small amount of farmland and were founding Self Help Groups. At first, I didn't understand what and how these Self Help Groups worked. One day, the Action Aid office called the Fellows and Village Development Youth, members to give a class about Self Help Groups. It was a 5 days class. Teacher U Win Shwe Maung from other group came and lectured us about Self Help Groups. The lessons covered the characteristics of the Self Help Groups, basic facts on savings and loans, the group's responsibilities and fundamental facts and keeping records and accounts (individual savings, loan returned money, group's savings, lending and borrowing, two column ledger accounts, ledger, monthly and yearly accounts, etc.)

So when we returned to the village after the class, we divided the people who were chosen according to the project into 3 groups. We found 2 groups from the chosen people who have no farm land with 17 members each, they were named the "Toe Tat Aung" group and the"Ah Man Thit" group. We founded a group from the chosen people with only small amount of farmland with 15 members as the "Doe In Ah" group. And we taught them all the lessons
from the class we learned, such as the characteristics of the association, dividing responsibilities among members, teaching them how to do accounting, discussing the benefits of saving money, setting the rules and regulations of group. There were many difficulties and challenges at first. We had to struggle a lot since almost all the members from the group were women and most of them are illiterate, and the highest education in the group was a $5^{\text {th }}$ grader. So we had to give a lot of time everyday to teach them how to keep records and do accounts. Some members didn't want to attend the meetings weekly, there was weak cooperation with other people since they had no experience working within a group. So we really had a lot of challenges and I even lost confidence at first.

At first, we saved only 100 Kyats each week, which is the minimum amount of saving that members can afford. We gave a loan to a member in Kyats which was equal with 100 USD after 3 months. Members boosted their income with that loan by buying and breeding pigs, selling something and some small farmers used it as a farming expenditure. They set the financial rules themselves. The leaders of the group (leader, secretary, accountant, the one who's responsible for the vault, the two people who areresponsible for the vault's keys, the one who keeps records) were decided and elected every year.

We started to achieve success after one year. Less and less people had to borrow loans from financially secure people (third party rich persons) and the interest rate became lower and lower. Other non-members from the village started to get interested to participate in Self Help Groups and therefore we had to found them their own Self Help Group. The interest rates in these villages become significantly lower than before. We had to pay $8-10 \%$ interest rate and now we only have to pay $3-5 \%$ rate. And Self Help Group members got into the good habit of attending to the meetings regularly, and they always come to village's meetings punctually. They do a lot of business such as selling products at the village's festivals and harvesting peanuts together as a group to increase the income and capital of the group. Some members from the group can now lead in the activities that contribute to the village's prosperity and development, and villages also trust them a lot. And some women from the village who weren't
included in the project also founded a group by their own initiative, and fixed meeting dates and saved money themselves.

We can participate a lot in village's development activities both financially or with the group strength. We save money separately at the bank as the emergency health fund for members if anyone has urgent health problems. That money will be loaned out with no interest rate for one month. Each Self Help Group donated 1lakh to build a village square and they can also donate a lot as a group in religious festivals. Now the weekly saving is increased to 300 kyats and individual saving reached 60000 kyats for each. Members did businesses separately at first and now they do rice trading as the group's investment.

Being able to save money regularly can't be considered successful for Self Help Groups. What's more important is returning the loan. If you don't know how to return the loan, the circle of loan can be a lot longer. It is very important to be able to return the loan with installments without weighing the debtor down. It would be very difficult to return the loan only one time along with the interest. In the early days of founding the group, we had to patiently explain and encourage the members to discuss, and encourage them to discuss more positively and to follow the group's rules, to analyze the group yearly and discuss with Self Help Groups from other villages. It is especially very important for leaders to attend their meetings regularly and check and inspect their saving plans and suggest them for necessary sectors.

Now all the groups are around 5 years old. I'm very happy to see these groups not being ruined and they can manage their tasks, records and accounts themselves. I'm proud of myself for being able to help and support my village and region in a way with the knowledge I learned.

Ye Kyaw Htet

Sharr Pin Kine Villge
Pakhokku Township

## Ah Man Thit Women's Self Help Group

## First Step

Women from Ywar Thit village were hesitant and afraid to talk in public at first, had no interest in founding a group, gave no response or discussion when someone was talking about a subject and refused the participate in the group because they didn't understand accounting and records. We founded a Self Help Group with 40 members even though they said they didn't want to participate.

## Second Step

They now know how to do accounting and keeping records, discuss and argue on what they think is right, help, cooperate and depend on each other and be able to manage the finance after the group becomes a little older and stronger.

## Third Step

The women's Self Help Group can understand how to make a project for the development of village after a little while. They now participate in village matters, lead and find financial help for the village's electricity, donate tables and chairs with the money the saved and from the donations and donate "Mont Hin Khar" (a traditional Myanmar fish soup with vermicelli) in religious festivals according to their village development.

## Fourth Step

Self Help Group members are now able help women from Ywar Thit village who are the victims of domestic abuse, or any other abuse, and help them settle and help them socially or reporting to the police. I never thought they would be capable of that much. Now this group becomes the rock of all the villages since the village society trusts and depend them for their charitable mind for the village and empathy for other people.

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