



# Solidarity in Times of Uncertainty

Two Year Report  
2018 & 2019



The Karen Women's Organization  
Empowerment | Equality | Freedom

**Cover Photo:** Fund for Global Human Rights  
**Back Photo:** Fund for Global Human Rights

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## Acknowledgements

The Karen Women's Organization (KWO) has produced a two-year report which highlights our achievements in 2018 and 2019. We are grateful to the many who continue to make our work possible. KWO is especially appreciative to our long-term donors: the **American Jewish World Service, DAK foundation, the Fund for Global Human Rights, the International Rescue Commission, Inter Pares, The Border Consortium and Planet Wheeler Foundation.**

Despite the many challenges that compromise our efforts for peace in Burma's current socio-political environment, we remain committed to our mission and serving our communities.

We value the insights of the many organizations and individuals over the years who have supported us in a leadership capacity, which has in turn strengthened the Karen grassroots women's movement. Our work would not be possible without you.

Our two-year report is a testament to what is possible even in the most difficult of times. We are immensely grateful to our members, networks, friends and donors that grant us the opportunity through funding, time and resources to continue this work.

In Solidarity,  
**The Sisters of the Karen Women's Organization**

## About KWO

The Karen Women's Organization (KWO) was formed in 1949 and re-organised in 1985. Currently KWO has a membership of more than 60,000 women living in Karen State, Burma and in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. KWO is a leading indigenous women's organization working in protection and our programs directly serve women, girls, children, and the most vulnerable people in our community. We promote women's leadership, gender sensitivity and community ownership in all aspects of our work. KWO is active in four main sectors: Education, Health, Social Welfare & Organising and Information Sharing.

## Empowerment | Equality | Freedom

**KWO Vision:** In a federal Burma, all communities have gender equality, the protection and promotion of indigenous people's rights, human rights, and justice.

**KWO Mission:** KWO is an ethnic women's community-based organization that empowers women so they have the capacity and power to solve their own problems and participate in decision-making that will affect their lives. KWO participates in the struggle to stop all kinds of oppression of women and of children and provides support for communities in the Thai-Burma border and in Karen State, Burma.

## KWO Goals

1. Ensure that KWO is an organization which is strong, sustainable, effective and healthy.
2. Karen women are free from any kind of oppression and enjoy an adequate standard of living.
3. Karen women have gender equality in all spheres of life at all levels.
4. Karen women are encouraged to participate in political leadership at different levels and work together to achieve federalism.
5. In our community, our people, especially women and children, can practice and enjoy full indigenous rights.

# *Donors*

## *2018 - 2020*

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American Jewish World Service

BKKe Foundation

Burmese Relief Center

Dave and Kerry Foundation

Foundation for a Just Society

Enfants du Mekong

European Union

Fund for Global Human Rights

ING Foundation

Inter Pares

International Rescue Committee (IRC/PROM, IRC/DFAT)

Mae Tao Clinic

Open Society Foundations Myanmar

Planet Wheeler Foundation

Refugee Council of Australia

Right to Play

Rural Indigenous Sustainable Education

Saferworld

Save the Children

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency

The Border Consortium

The Border Consortium/  
Livelihood & Food Security Funds

Union Aid Abroad: Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad

Refugees International Japan

*KWO also recieved private donations from the Karen community abroad and individuals as well as frm the International Women of Courage Award, also referred to as the U.S. Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award.*



*Photo credit: Fund for Global Human Rights*

## Introduction

In times of difficulty, it is necessary to continue mobilizing. Reflecting on 2018 and 2019, the Karen Women's Organization (KWO) recognizes our achievements with cautious optimism. Our advocacy efforts amplified the experiences of Karen communities inside Burma and along the border by bringing awareness to their needs and shared challenges, including ending violence against women and girls and the impacts of reductions in cross-border aid. Through women's discussions at the camp, district, township and central level, KWO is creating impact by changing behaviours and beliefs.

The last two years were ones of networking and recognition of KWO's efforts towards advocating for peace and gender equality. We were honoured to accept the Women of Change award in 2018 Award from the United States Embassy in Yangon for our commitment to the advancement and protection of the rights of women and children in Burma. In March 2019, our General Secretary was awarded the International Women of Courage Award from the US State Department in Washington D.C. for supporting Karen women throughout their lives and for standing up for the Rohingya people when many continue to be silent in their suffering from the Burma Army. This two-year report is a testament to our efforts.

# Program Development & Progress

Our programs continued to evolve and speak to the requests from our community. An evaluation of the safe house, supported through the Social Welfare program led to several recommendations that we plan to implement. These include the use of safe house space for victims, increasing the carers skills and capacity and revised guidelines for home visits to strengthen case management. Additionally, we reviewed and standardized the nursery school curriculum by adapting our curriculum based on Karen culture, which includes the use of our surrounding environment, encouraging our mother tongue and we improved the Karen Young Women's Leadership School (KYWLS) adding a gender perspective to the topics to be in line with feminism. The education of our community is important and to ensure all students are granted an equal opportunity to access learning.

The impact from our awareness raising sessions is evident in the behavioral changes from men, women and children who use and practice what they learn in their daily lives. Even though we cannot say for certain what the biggest behavioral change has been, we can gradually witness the shift in attitudes and attentiveness to women and child protection, as well as justice for victims and community participation.

KWO expanded the reach of our work across our networks in Karen civil-society and with other regional human-rights organizations. Our close working relationship with the Karen Peace Support Network, Karen Rivers Watch and other Karen civil-society organizations, increases the access that KWO is able to work in and have an impact. The main issues that KWO and our networks faced was a lack of community participation and consultation in the peace process and reinforced commitments to indigenous people's rights including land, development and environmental rights. We were also challenged by the ongoing struggle to apply community-based operating mechanisms and locally led practices that should not be threatened by outside influences.

The Burma Army's continued abuse of power remains the biggest obstacle for true and meaningful peace in the country. This is evident in their attempts to persuade Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), against the backdrop of them violating its terms by committing human rights abuses and building roads in restricted, ceasefire areas of Karen State. The Burma Army's



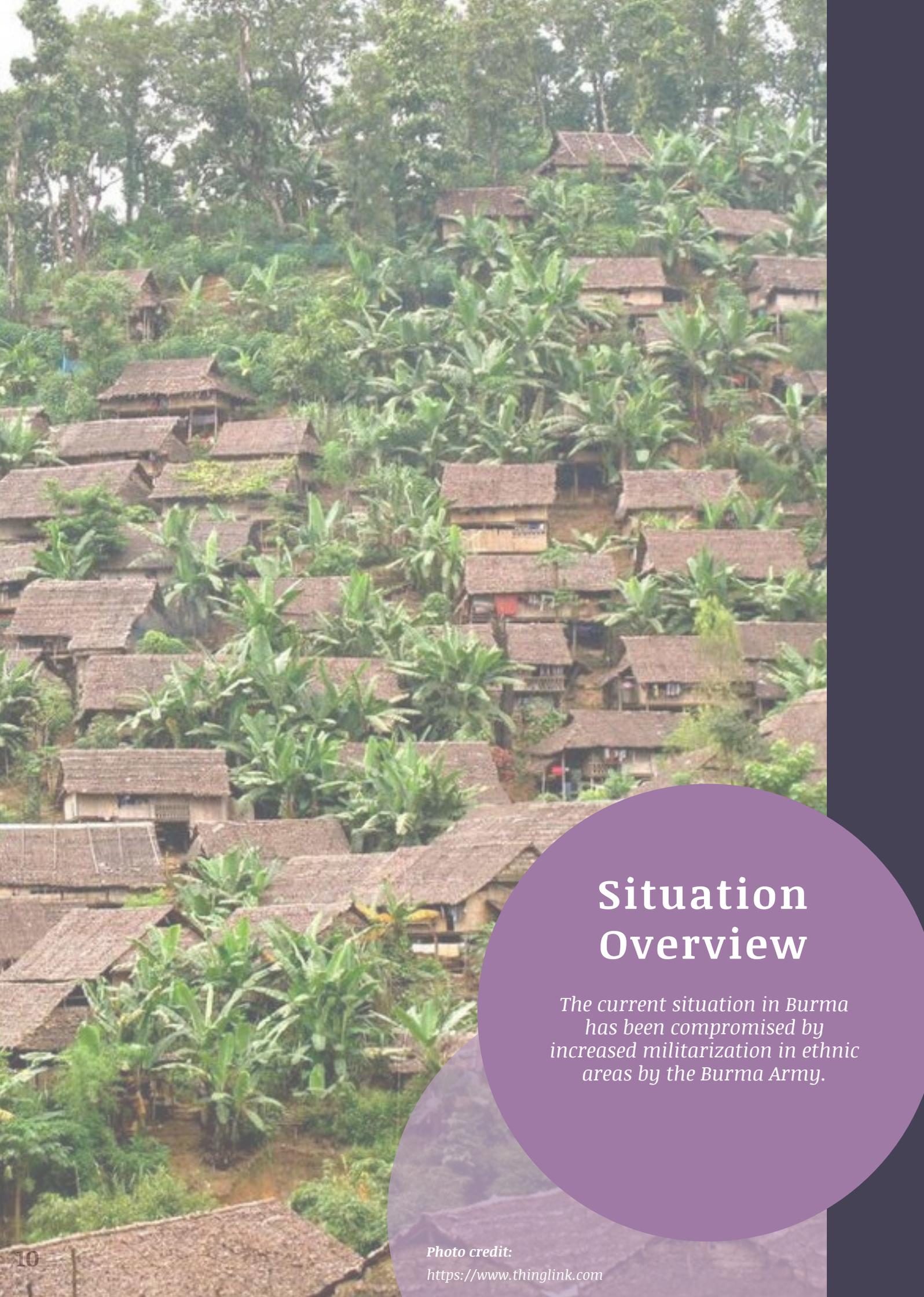
actions are responsible for wide-spread displacement and blocking aid to isolated communities in need of life saving materials. This type of behaviour demands questioning about the intentions behind their desires for peace and makes the work for KWO and civil society more difficult. We condemn these actions and will nonetheless continue to work for our people as best as possible, regardless of the circumstances.

Low levels of women’s participation across social and political sectors is an area of advocacy KWO and networks continue to address, as well as advocating for visibility and funding for the basic needs of refugees and IDPs. KWO and various other civil society-organizations work closely together to coordinate and strategize the most effective means to support our community and vocalize their concerns to stakeholders in appeals for funding.

Given Burma’s constantly changing state of socio-political affairs, the scope of our work will also depend on how this impacts our community. We remain grateful to our long-term and new supporters who challenge us with your questions and encourage us in your solidarity for our efforts to contribute to a free, fair and democratic Burma for all.

### Total Beneficiaries

Program	Total	F	M
<b>Social Welfare</b>	24,967	18,594	6,373
<b>Education</b>	42,213	25,916	16,297
<b>Health</b>	3,523	2,684	537
<b>Organising and Information Sharing</b>	30,512	9,997	20,515
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>101,215</b>	<b>57,191</b>	<b>43,721</b>



## Situation Overview

*The current situation in Burma has been compromised by increased militarization in ethnic areas by the Burma Army.*

Photo credit:  
<https://www.thinglink.com>

Combined with broken ceasefires, increased displacement and a lack of security for women and children, we are frustrated by the ongoing postponement of the peace-talks and delayed commitments by the government for democratic reforms. The civilian government is letting the Burma Army control the peace process. Additionally, impunity by the Burma Army is still taking place as human-rights abuses are committed against the backdrop of peace talks and throughout the ceasefire period. The government is not stopping it. This impunity also allows state-sponsored violence against ethnic women to take place with little to no repercussions. We believe that the conduct by the Burma Army evades any meaningful engagement or commitment to peace. While there have been attempts from the international community to bring the Burma Army to justice, there is still a need for accountability and transparency mechanisms to be strengthened to ensure survivors are granted reparations. KWO is seriously concerned about the deterioration of human rights and democratic principles under the National League for Democracy (NLD) led government.

Prospects for peace in Burma continue to be undermined by militarization and policies enacted by the Burmese government that fail to uphold and preserve the dignity of ethnic people and fulfill their desires. The lack of progress in the peace process remains the most disappointing. Not only is there inadequate representation of women among key stakeholders, but ongoing conflict has resulted in a lack of confidence in the commitments made to peace by the armed actors. The peace process has been stuck in a deadlock, which has left KWO to doubt its significance to our community.

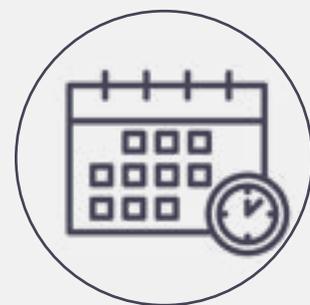
### Prospects for Peace Undermined by Militarization & Conflict



**Stalled Negotiations,  
Broken Ceasefires**



**Women Targeted through  
Conflict-Related  
Sexual Violence**



**Delayed Peace  
Talks**

While the peace process falters against stalled negotiations, civilians have been forcibly displaced inside Burma resulting in increased risks to their security. According to a 2018 report by our network the Karen Peace Support Network titled, *The Nightmare Returns: Karen Hopes for Peace & Stability Dashed by the Burma Army's Actions*, the Burma Army has been deploying troops into Karen State's Mutraw district since 2008. To date, more than 1,500 Burma Army troops have now crossed into Karen National Union (KNU) controlled areas of Mutraw's Luthaw township, breaching the terms of the NCA and provoking multiple clashes with the Karen National Liberation Army's (KNLA) 5th Brigade. The majority of those displaced by the Burma Army's operations have been running from the country's civil war for decades. Civilians have been unjustly targeted and are fearful that their children will be forced to relive the same patterns of war.

While the KNU and the Burma Army are both signatories to the NCA, which prohibits the expansion of military infrastructure and troop reinforcements in ceasefire areas, at least eight new Burma Army battalions have entered Luthaw District and began constructing a military road to connect their military bases at Ler Mu Plaw and Kay Pu. If the road is built, indigenous Karen villagers will be permanently displaced from their homes and ancestral village territories. The continued escalation of violence and disregard for human rights, led to the KNU Supreme Headquarters releasing a statement denouncing the Burma Army for "breaching the terms of the NCA" with regards to its military operations in Mutraw. The KNU statement called on the Burma Army to cease its military activities as a way of demonstrating trust building.

Women in particular are at risk of being targeted in conflict through sexual violence. Soldiers use sexual violence as a strategy of war to intimidate and traumatize young women and girls. Across Burma, the Army continues to use various tactics against ethnic people in Northern and Western Burma. A 2018 update by Human Rights Watch revealed testimonies of sexual violence by the Burmese military against ethnic people which included data from KWO. In reported cases of rape, over half are committed by high ranking military officers.

As a result of the going conflict and coordinated, tactful attempts by the Burma Army to undermine principles of democracy, we advocated for and provided evidence to the United Nations Fact Finding Mission to Myanmar. Evidence from the mission supports claims that the Burma Army is responsible for the genocide of Rohingya people in Rakhine State as well as war crimes and crimes against humanity in Shan and Kachin States. KWO advocated for these findings, especially because the patterns of abuse were used against our Karen community during periods of intensive conflict.

## Deterioration of Freedom of Speech & Right to Peaceful Assembly Undermined by the NLD

In another worrying sign of human-rights decline, the NLD-led government passed several strict new laws limiting people's freedom of expression which saw an increase in the arrest of human rights activists speaking out for their communities.

Journalists also continue to be jailed for doing their jobs and reporting on various human-rights abuses across the country. In a high-profile case, Reuters reporters Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone were unjustly imprisoned and sentenced to seven-years for breaking the Official Secrets Act while investigating a massacre of Rohingya Muslims. The two were later freed after more than 500 days in jail after lobbying from journalists and advocates who challenged the commitment of the NLD to uphold media freedom.

## Mounting Pressure for Refugee Return

Refugee food and basic services has been reduced as funding moves inside Burma to support various development and infrastructure programs. The conditions for refugees to return home are not safe, and yet there remains regular pressure on them to go back to Karen State. Refugees inside the camp face the burden of choice in determining whether or not to stay where there are reduced rations and employment opportunities or returning to their villages where they face the risk of landmines and unstable conditions in which conflict could erupt at any time. The Karen Refugee Committee stated huge cuts to funding for administration of the Thai-Burma border refugee camps makes it impossible for more than 1,000 camp workers to do their jobs effectively - with 70% of operational costs cut. KWO is an active voice on the issue of refugee return. A lot of people, especially parents and young adults have tried to find opportunities outside of the camps which often compromise their safety - especially if they are without proper documentation. In Mae La camp, standard support to a refugee from The Border Consortium (TBC) through the newly introduced "Food Cash Card" system, is now 195 Thai baht per month (7 USD) – which is not enough to purchase a very basic level of food.

KWO continues to work within this current social-political context but it is clear in many ways that our **security is in increasingly at risk**. Our offices were raided 8 times by immigration and police in 2018, and there have been several times it has been unsafe for our leaders to travel into Burma.

We are pleased that despite this situation KWO continues to grow while providing increased services to our community. The women who lead and work for KWO have once again **demonstrated our ability to adapt and move forward**.

## Program Information

KWO responds to the needs of our communities across four different programs including Education, Health, Organizing and Information Sharing and Social Welfare.

Across these areas, we support refugees in the nine-camps along the Thai-Burma border and are active in seven districts in Karen State. The reductions in cross-border aid have made our work more challenging but nonetheless, we are proud of our commitment to deliver services despite the funding gaps.



**Organizing &  
Information Sharing**



**Health**



**Education**



**Social Welfare**

# Funded Projects 2018, 2019

## Organizing & Information Sharing

Women's Voice and Resource Centres  
KWO Camp Support Project  
Capacity Building  
Sustainable Transformation for Agriculture, Nutrition & Development  
in Uplands

## Education

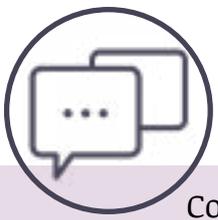
Nursery Schools  
Special Education  
Dormitories  
Unaccompanied Children  
Karen Young Women's Leadership School (KYWLS)

## Health

Baby Kits  
Traditional Birth Attendant Support (TBAs)

## Social Welfare

Safe Houses and Women's Protection  
Income Generation  
Strengthening Women's Survivors



## Organizing & Information Sharing

Community-mobilization activities are how KWO works directly with the community to be the most reliable, trusted voice in the community and connect on various issues. This is not a one-way approach. We listen and document their concerns so that we can share them with stakeholders who can help change the situation in the camps and in Karen State. KWO's Organizing and Information Sharing program includes a wide variety of documentation initiatives on women's empowerment, advocacy efforts and community mobilization. Our team conducts training, events, and activities related to women's rights, indigenous rights and peace building in seven-refugee camps and inside Karen State. Between 2018 and 2019, there were 51,791 beneficiaries (15,484 in 2018 and 36,307 in 2019).

The program works to support raising the voices of young women and girls and advocates on their behalf through encouraging dialogue and unity within the Karen community in the camps and in Karen State through workshops, meetings, consultations, and exchange activities. There are various leadership roles and development opportunities available to women through this program which equip them with the skills to speak for themselves.

Home visits are an important part of the information sharing program, in which KWO staff share updates to families and leaders about the situation inside Burma and along the border. In 2018, we visited 1299 families. During these visits KWO staff also encouraged them to send their children to school, discussed their rights and advised them on good health practice. Through central organizing trips, KWO staff meet with people from the camp and districts. In 2018, we held meetings with 3308 representatives. Camp and District level KWO leaders hold similar trips and meetings in their areas which had 7110 people attend in 2018.

Awareness raising is a significant part of this project with efforts to coordinate days to bring human-rights knowledge to the community. There were 4,208 people who attended the co-organized days such as International Peace Day Event. There were 1,396 people who attended KWO Day in 2018 and 929 in 2019. These events are important to bring visibility to issues like gender awareness and recognition of female leadership. Related trainings are organized in relation to these events. KWO provided community leaders with training on gender awareness, and CEDAW to 616 women and 253 men in attendance for a total of 869 beneficiaries in 2018, and in 3500 beneficiaries in 2019.

KWO has had to adapt to shifting conditions which makes this program all the more essential. Over the last two years, we have developed a new financial management system for the staff, held numerous community events, did extensive capacity building, and conducted a more extensive home visit program in order to speak individually with women and families. KWO always shows our solidarity with other ethnic groups or women groups by releasing statements to openly share our stance and belief that we are in solidarity with our community in our demands for the same values and rights..

### **Organizing & Information Sharing Projects**

1. Women's Voice and Resource Centre
2. KWO Camp Support Project
3. Capacity Building
4. Sustainable Transformation for Agriculture, Nutrition & Development in Uplands



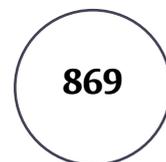
**Beneficiaries  
between 2018-19**



**Families visited  
in 2018**



**Attendees to  
co-organized  
awareness days**



**Beneficiaries  
in 2018**

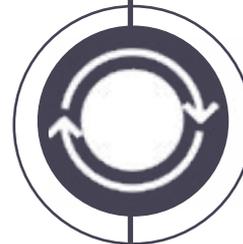
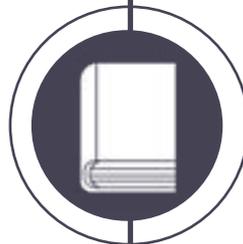


**Beneficiaries  
in 2019**

# Program Achievements

## Capacity Building

KWO worked with 1,194 females, 142 males in 2018 and in 2019 we supported 1,207 females and 178 males participating in community awareness raising workshops on topics related to women's health, protection, safety, and rights.



## Published Resources and New Materials

We successfully published the updated version of KWO constitution, KWO operation guideline, KWO Policy, magazine and other project related training manuals, guidelines, pamphlets, booklets and posters for awareness raising and distribution.

## Networking to Raise the Concerns of Refugees and IDPs

KWO representatives also met with different international groups such as NGOs, human rights campaign groups, refugee network, women's groups, donors, potential donors, government officials and UN representatives to raise the voices of community especially the perspective of the Karen women as refugees, IDPs and those who live on the ground where they are not sure whether the peace process will continue or not.

## Recognition of Women's Leadership

KWO recognized 72 women working as long-time leaders for KWO for between 10 to 25 years on KWO Day in 2018. In 2019, we celebrated 71 women.

## Organizing the Karen Women's Seminar

KWO and networks successfully conducted the 4th Karen Women seminar with collaboration from the Karen Peace Support Network to strengthen the structures of the Karen Grassroot Women Network and its membership for future advocacy purposes.

## Media Training

Successfully conducted media training for the restructure team of the KWO media team.



*Photo credit: Fund for Global Human Rights*

## Resource Centre: Organizing Trips to Refugee Camps & Inside Karen State

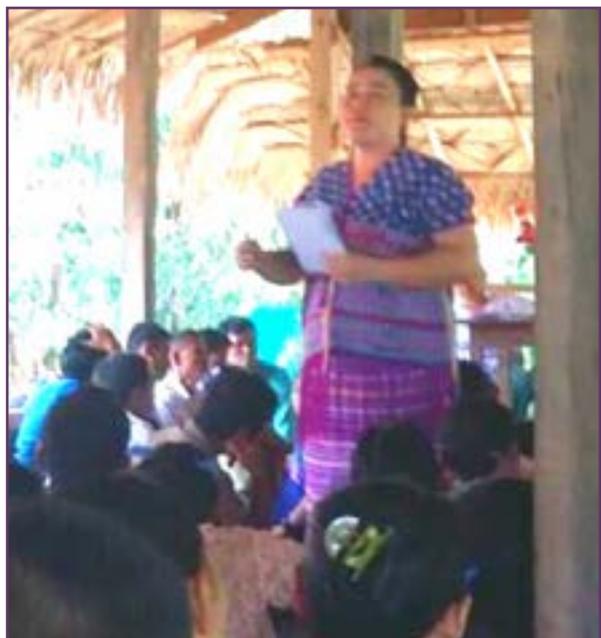
KWO believes that communities are stronger when they are mobilized collectively – this means that men and women must work together in harmony to work towards common goals. The purpose of the organizing trips is to inform communities about KWO’s projects and progress and to answer any questions of concern. It is also done to encourage feedback so we can adjust our programs to meet the needs of our community accordingly.

Organizing trips strengthen the relationships and ties with our community organizations such as with youth and minority groups. They also keep open and maintain channels of regular communication between KWO managers, offices, refugee camps and members inside Karen State. All levels of KWO staff work together to travel and meet and share information on a wide range of women and community leaders. Communication access can be difficult depending on the area KWO staff work in, which is why efforts to make these trips and discuss in person are all the more important. Security risks for staff traveling continues to be a significant challenge. At times, funding has also compromised the ability to conduct these trips on a regular basis.

In 2018, KWO was able to conduct 16 organizing trips. In 2019, there were 15 organizing trips in both refugee camps and Karen State. Between 300 and 1000 participated in each trip including KWO senior staff, KWO members, community leaders, women and youth and those who are working for CBOs in the community which included discussing and consulting with various levels of leadership in the community as well as villagers about how their situation is improving or worsening in Burma’s current socio-political climate.

KWO coordinators are well versed in using their voices to communicate challenges and share developments on project work – this is of great need considering the many limitations some members of the community in terms of travel restrictions. Giving them information in a dignified manner keeps them engaged and grants ownership over how their decisions are made. Trainings are run regularly on KWO’s Constitution, organizational structure and activities as well as on leadership, public speaking and documentation.

*Photos: (1) and (3) KWO distributing materials and goods.  
Photo 2: KWO staff during a presentation*



## **KWO Camp Support Project**

The KWO Camp support project assists elected KWO position holders in seven camps with basic monthly stipends and funds some of the in-camp KWO office cost operations which gives women more availability to work effectively in community management. The project has been running for ten-years. Project participants are given stipends between 300 and 1,500 baht per month depending on their responsibilities at KWO. It also includes supporting women to improve their work and stand for the best interests of their communities.

## **Capacity Building Project**

In order to support and strengthen KWO's capacity to provide essential services to the Karen refugee and village communities, the capacity building project aims to ensure the effective operation of KWO's work in refugee camps. These activities have been running regularly for ten-years despite shifts in funding. Our awareness raising topics focus on the rights and protection of women and children as well KWO policy and guidelines.

Thirteen capacity building training took place for KWO staff in the refugee camps and town offices in 2018. All the training provides a basis for our team to improve their skills and make better decisions while working effectively to multitask the many program demands and responsibilities. This training enhances their abilities to perform and provide for the thousands of people in their communities. The curriculum is used from modules that were developed in 2009 and 2010 and revised accordingly by 20 project staff.

## **Documentation and Publication**

Wide-spread human-rights abuses continue to take place with military impunity across South-eastern Burma. Sustained documentation of these human rights abuses is an ongoing task that takes place with the hope of actors of such abuses being held accountable. The documentation also aims to raise awareness within the Karen community and at various levels of international and regional advocacy to show evidence of systematic violence perpetuated against Karen women by the Burma Army. The documentation process began in 2002 after recognizing that a record of the abuses could be beneficial in the future for legal redress for survivors and their families.

The documentation team tracks and collects cases of sexual gender-based violence and various other human rights abuses in Karen State. This information is gathered and shared selectively to ensure confidentiality of survivors on organizing trips, with donors and stakeholders as a means to advocate for stronger accountability mechanisms under the rule of law. To date, the Burma Army denies any allegations of rape and abuse against women.

The KWO Magazine is produced and shared quarterly in Karen, which includes updates on a variety of issues and activities related to KWO or general interest of women. Readers are from Karen State and the refugee camps. They can obtain access to the magazine through the Internet but we also provide copies on our organizing trips.

Press releases, appeal letters and statements are also produced by the documentation team on issues including violence against women and urgent matters surrounding cross-border aid cuts and the refugee/IDP situation. In 2018 and 2019, KWO wrote statements addressing violence against women and girls and prospects for peace in the country.

The security of KWO staff remains a concern, especially as the restrictions documenting human-rights abuses are increasing in a censored media-environment, notably where facts are disputed by the government depending on the source. KWO's worked hard to establish a reputation that is credible and staff have been well-trained on how to minimize the risk for themselves and women they speak with.

### **Sustainable Transformation for Agriculture, Nutrition & Development in Uplands**

The STAND-UP Project receives funds from 2017 to 2019 to support village development committees, children's nutrition, and institutional operational and economic sustainability in four districts in Karen State.

Through the STAND-UP project, KWO was able to extend the nutrition awareness and training to include the parents of nursery school children. After completing our training and awareness events, parents reported an increase in knowledge on how to better care for their children. Parents learned how to provide balanced meals for their growing children and they developed skills and techniques to clean their children thoroughly and prevent the spread of diseases. These training sessions also served as encouragement for parents to keep bringing their students to nursery school instead of bringing the child into the field where it can be dangerous. Parents reported feeling relieved that they can bring their children to the nursery school when they go to work.

KWO believes it is not only women who need to work on improving the statue of gender equality - it is both men and women's responsibility to bring equality for women in our community, and that gender equality empowers the whole community. If we are going to create greater equality in our community KWO strongly believes that men and women must work together.

Generally, KWO only offers training to women, however through the STAND-UP project, we were able to open up and offer the workshop and training to both men and women in the community. We focused on providing gender awareness training with men especially those who take responsibility for community such as township leaders, village tract leaders, and village heads. As we focused on these community leaders, we conducted gender training in direct cooperation with them. Through providing workshops to these local leaders, we found out that some of them are more aware of gender issues and gender equality than others, and those who already had some understanding about gender issues were more willing to change their mind rather than those who had never heard of the issue before.

By joining different kinds of training KWO staff skills conducting training improved and was shared to local leaders, including KNU leaders in the districts. KWO designed workshops around gender awareness in the Karen community. Most of the training that we gave covered local KNU leadership such as township leaders and village tract leaders including village heads villagers where most of them had never attended a training about gender awareness and equality. The workshop covered KWO history, sex vs gender.

defining gender, masculine vs feminine definitions and traditions, stereotypes, gender inequality and injustice, valuing women's and men's work, CEDAW, and an evaluation. participatory and small group discussions and exercises using popular education techniques.

Established in 2003, KWO's advocacy team works to raise awareness on the many human-rights issues and violations of women in Karen State. The advocacy team uses their capacity to speak truth to power by calling for stronger legal mechanisms to hold perpetrators of abuse accountable and by making calls for genuine peace. By partnering with local stakeholders working for democracy in the country and attending workshops as well as consultations with regional and international actors, we increase our visibility and dedication to the issues at hand. KWO's channels of advocacy include regular collective efforts with Karen CSOs for strength and solidarity.

## Changes & Developments in 2019

In 2019, KWO continued to conduct a range of community mobilization activities to share updates on the status of our work and current situation, which includes the stall of the peace process. We finalized our KWO membership data so that we can print membership cards and review capacity building materials/guidelines for improvement. KWO also provided stipends to 415 KWO elected leaders and staff at central, camp, and district levels of the townships (excluding project staff at camps and township) who work full time and provide services and advocacy for communities in the refugee camps and Karen State. We ran two main central offices, three contact centers in Karen State and at least 15 KWO branch offices in associated districts and refugee camps. Our office spaces are for trainings, meetings and for KWO leaders, staff and beneficiaries who are travelling.

The KWO documentation and media team participated in a strategic communications workshop at the end of 2019, which drew on insights from the team to take steps towards the drafting of a communications strategy. This strategy intended to strengthen the dissemination of KWO's work in our wider network for grassroots women's capacity building and community ownership. KWO is also working on developing human resources guidelines based on our policy and Constitution which matches the desires of our community. We will also make some big changes to the website – which will be an ongoing improvement and area of development moving forward. As well, the roles and responsibilities of the media team have been clarified as it relates to the posting and sharing on the KWO website. Updates will be more consistent in Karen and English languages to meet the engagement levels of our audiences in Burma and abroad.



## Health

This is one of our smaller programs, but also a vital one for our community. We focus on providing personal hygiene care, household sanitation, nutritional awareness, and environmental management of rivers, streams and surrounding. We encourage parents to grow vegetables to provide healthy, nutritious food to their children to promote strong minds and bodies. The health program supported 11,295 beneficiaries in 2018 and 22,631 beneficiaries in 2019. Under the health program, KWO focuses more on health awareness. As advocates for better health policies, we encourage communities to care for themselves and the environment around them.

KWO helps to fill gaps where there is a lack of support and access to healthcare services in the camps and in Karen State. Women in Karen State have limited access to healthcare, and the maternal and infant mortality rate is one of the highest in the world today. KWO collaborates with community-based health agencies to support local health workers and provides material assistance to new mothers.

KWO also advocates on a variety of issues surrounding women's maternal and child health awareness, with health agencies working both in Karen State as well as in the camps for the betterment of the whole community. Through community organizing events, KWO provides a space to inform and educate where health misconceptions may have contributed to an incorrect narrative and confusion. To set a positive example for the community, we encourage everyone to keep shared spaces clean by picking up garbage that is found in the streets and rivers. KWO also runs health, developmental and sexual reproductive health education workshops with young women at the camp and central levels.

Health education is done at various levels of the community through school and dormitory visits, as well as informal home trips with family members. KWO's presence shows our commitment to addressing concerns on a collective and individual basis. The one-on-one time spent with families combines health education with more general social care and can be prompted by a concern raised by an individual in the community, such as regularly seeing a child play in dirty areas. For pregnant women, especially first-time expecting mothers, KWO monitors their health status and provides material assistance if required.

KWO also extends itself to patients who request accompaniment to medical care at hospitals, picking up prescriptions and covering the costs of outstanding medical fees. For those who cannot afford at home care, particularly for the elderly or sick, KWO provides necessary care which may include providing emotional support and encouragement. We also provide them with food, clean and cook for them and basic household care.

While the amount of assistance KWO provides is exceptional, we do not in any way assume the role of professional health-care providers. Keeping in line with Karen traditions, we encourage our Karen people to facilitate traditional types of health care alongside more modern approaches, such as encouraging the use of traditional balms alongside modern health-aid tablets or creams. There is ongoing encouragement for our community to stay active and make every effort to maintain a good, healthy lifestyle to enjoy a long, fulfilled life.

## Health Projects

1. Baby Kits

2. Traditional Birth Attendant Support (TBAs)

## Program Achievements

300

Baby Kits delivered to new mothers in five districts of Karen State and one IDP camp in 2018 and 2019. These are basic supplies that allow KWO to increase the awareness of sanitation, nutrition and hygiene to new young mothers.

75

Supported traditional birth attendants (TBAs) in 2018 who help with the safe delivery of babies. They assisted with the birth of 200 babies and 100 pregnant women at Ei Hta Hta IDP were provided with nutritional awareness and food.

679

Women attended health awareness sessions in Ei Htu Hta and 1912 women in seven districts in Karen State camps and 2665 health awareness training in 2019.



## **Baby Kit and Women's Health Project**

The goal of the Baby Kit project is to improve the health and well-being of mothers and newborn babies in Karen State. KWO has supplied new mothers and babies with baby kits that include basic hygiene materials for the mother and child within the first few months after birth. In recognition of the importance of family planning and reproductive health, KWO ensures the family understands the best approaches in raising a family. Our aim is to provide more basic health awareness for the new mother and newborn babies, such as how to take care of themselves and their babies. When we talk about hygiene, we use this program as a way to encourage good practice to take care of ourselves and to encourage them to change their behavior to promote a better understanding of good quality of life practices.

The Baby Kit project has been active in remote areas for ten-years in seven districts including Mu Traw, Taw Oo, Kler Lwee Htu, Du Tha Htu, Pa An, Doo Pla Ya and Bli/Dweh. In Ei Hta Hta IDP camp, materials in the Baby Kits include nappies, laundry powder, baby clothes and a sarong for the mother, baby body soap body soap for mothers, nail clippers, candles and a health message pamphlet which is included to educate mothers and family members about the importance of maintaining their health as well as the babies. Some of the helpful advice it includes is to avoid smoking and drinking and how to maintain the baby's hygiene. In 2018, 300 Baby Kits were distributed.

*Photo credit: Saw Mort*

## **Distribution of Hygiene Packs**

KWO distributed hygiene packs and provided health training to 749 women who had become IDPs after an outbreak of fighting in Mu Traw district in 2018. KWO not only provided the packages but we also basic health education to women and men in those areas with a total of 2620 participants. This support was provided due to an emergency situation that arose and required an immediate response.

## **Traditional Birth Attendant Support (TBAs)**

Karen women tend to feel more comfortable with TBAs, despite the accessibility of clinics in the camp. KWO is an advocate of well-trained TBAs with 75 who are active in two camps in Mae La Oon and Mae Ra Moe refugee camp. TBAs are provided with delivery kits to use for home births. The kits can be refilled and restocked and include items such as a wash basin and a flashlight. One maternity kit is also provided to each TBA which includes one-time use items such as gloves and a blade with a handle. Organized TBA committees ensure regular training of trainers (TOT) and share information, solve problems and advocate for their role in the community. Alongside the births TBAs assist with, they also encourage information sharing in the camps and in Karen State. In 2018 awareness sessions were held in eight sites with a total of 1,187 women participating.

# **Changes & Developments in 2019**

KWO expanded our health awareness raising activities in Karen State by focusing on increasing access to basic women and children health care and nutrition for pregnant women. We conducted health awareness sessions on sanitation, nutrition, and hygiene in seven districts in Karen State. These sessions were attended by 1,094 participants (893 females, 201 male). There were also 60 pregnant women at ETT IDP who were provided with nutritious food support to ensure a healthy pregnancy. We continued to support 60 Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) who help with the safe delivery of babies in two refugee camps. They have assisted with the birth of 130 babies. In 2019, 300 more Baby Kits were distributed. We also provided 2665 health awareness training and 50 nutritional education workshops to pregnant women in IDP camp throughout 2019.

To incentivize good sustainable practice, we organized a ‘cleaning competition’ for villagers in one district. We plan to do it again in the near future as a way to educate and raise awareness for a cleaner environment by taking actions steps including cleaning the river, roads, separating garbage and waste. The competition is intended to promote a healthy shared living space for the community.

KWO continues to advocate and provide support to the most vulnerable who do not have anyone to help take care of them through formal and informal channels. This includes elderly people without access to emergency or basic treatment by working together with other health stakeholders from community to central levels. We also collaborate with health stakeholders who work in Karen State for strengthened policy and service implementation to better serve our community programs and systems.



## Education

Where there are challenges in existing mainstream education services, KWO's education team works to close these gaps in the refugee camps and areas in Karen State by running short and long-term training for staff and the community. We do this by advocating for their right to access and promote child safety and early child development as well as build the capacity for women's leadership and empowerment. We also place a significant emphasis on promoting community education system that focuses on preserving Karen culture. Under the education program, we supported access to 42,213 to people receiving services in the community including students, parents and teachers.

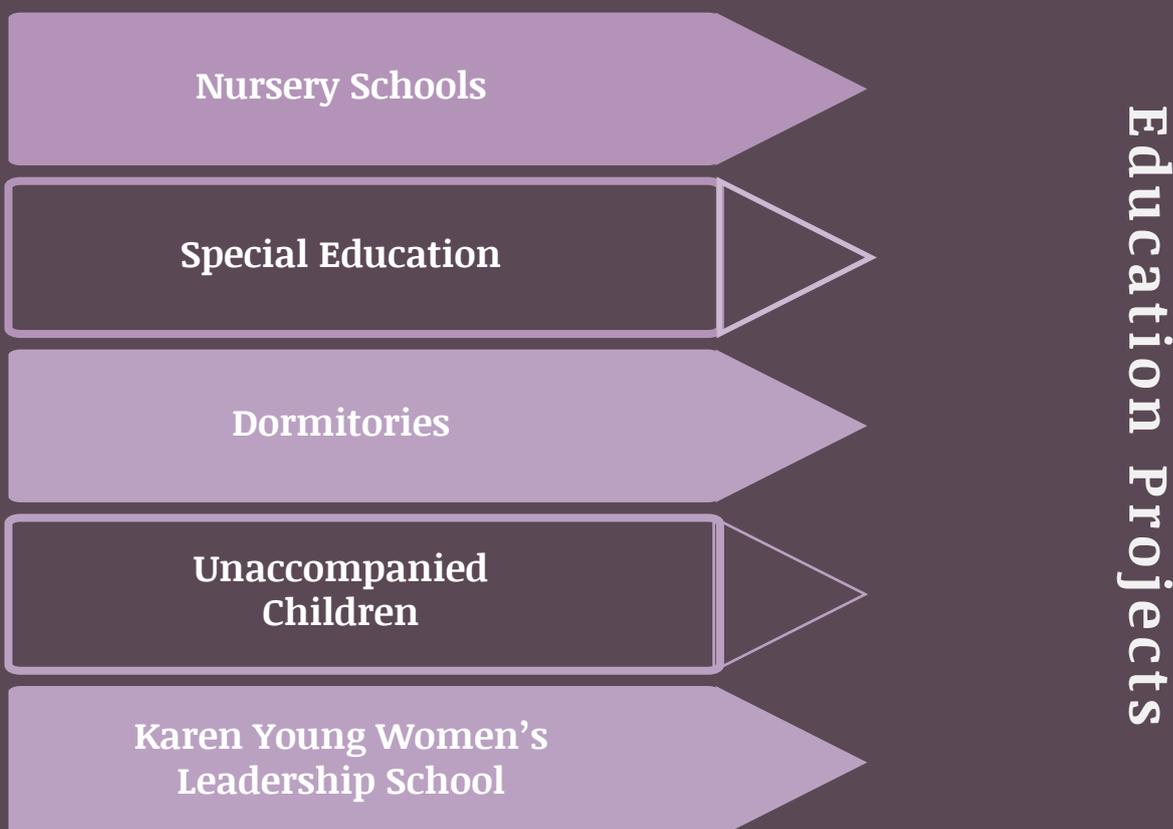
An important component of the education program is parent education, which encourages parents to promote their child's education. This includes invitations to join and participate in international rights days such as Deaf Day, which contributes to breaking harmful taboos around learning or physical disabilities.



All the training that KWO developed and runs is done must be appropriate/ relevant to our community. We want our community to be able to develop their skills and capacity in a supportive environment. It is important to KWO to maintain and manage our work by promoting our internal operations, while also observing other systems that work well and adapt into our context.

KWO works in formal and informal capacities by using our time and resources to support training of KWO staff as teachers and community leaders. This is done through regular visits with parents to develop relationships that are strengthened through unofficial discussions to show support for their decision to motivate their children to keep studying. By working to identify and address educational needs in the camp at district and township levels, KWO is mindful of the different age groups, learning abilities and style so that each student is able to benefit by performing to the best of their ability. KWO works with other organizations to support this growth and process, which is open to feedback to better tackle challenges collectively.

Our education projects include education for children with special needs, early childhood education, support for unaccompanied children, a leadership program for the future generation of young women and additional courses to build upon the knowledge and skills of young leaders, staff and community members. KWO believes that access to education is a path to empowerment.



## Nursery Schools

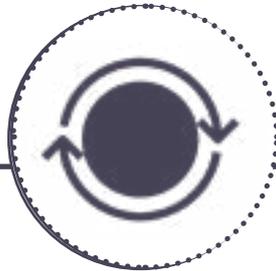
Early childhood education is extremely important to the Karen community. KWO believes that by fostering an environment where children have an early appreciation of learning, their families will support them to continue their education. KWO and other community-based organizations in 2018 and 2019 collaborated on developing new nursery school curricula to use across seven-Karen refugee camps with our own standardized curriculum. Our intention was to improve the teaching quality and ensure children are well-prepared with the skills and knowledge that are beneficial in entering primary school.

KWO runs a nursery school (NS) for preschool aged children in each of the seven refugee camps, and one IDP camp inside Karen State. Nursery school classes include beginner's literacy in three languages (Karen, Burmese and English), numeracy activities, basic science games and creative skills. In Karen areas, the literacy rate is very low and the dropout rate of children is very high. In an effort to create an even more sustainable nursery school problem, we work with the parents and school committees to increase contributions and fundraising support

## Program Achievements

119

Between 2018 and 2019, KWO successfully ensured the **inclusion of students** into mainstream schools with 119 students from the Special Education (SE) project, with less serious disabilities, now studying.



Participated in the **development of a Child Protection Referral System** for the refugee camps led by UNHCR and other child protection stakeholders.

5,099

KWO conducted **rights awareness events** on inclusive education with 5,099 community members and in the camps covering child rights and protection four times in which 4537 people participated in 2018. The school opening day, deaf day and New Year as the basis for these events.

in the community, in particular to the nursery school which saw reduced funding in 2019. The NS team also created ten new stories in 2018 for children to use in the schools. Children who attend nursery school also develop positive behaviors, social skills and receive a nutritious lunch in a safe environment.

In 2018, KWO supported 92 nursery schools. Among those, 51 were run by KWO and 41 were run by the Early Childhood Central Development (ECCD). For ECCD, KWO only supported the salaries. There was a total of 3,996 children who benefited from the project (2234 from KWO and 1762 from ECD). The schools are in the throughout the seven districts, as well as in Ei Htu Hta IDP Camp on the Salween River in Karen State. Due to funding reductions, KWO was only able to support 77 nursery schools in 2019. There were 54 supported by KWO and 23 by ECCD for a total of support to 3236 students.



Standardized **nursery school curriculum** was developed alongside the Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity to use in the camps and in Karen State. We revised and updated KYWLS school curriculum and successfully conducted TOT training for KWO staff and new KYWLS new teachers.



Successful development of 16 new story books as **visual teaching tools** for the nursery children based in the nursey schools from in the camps and inside Karen State.



KWO has participated in developing a coordination mechanism to **facilitate the active participation** of different service providers in free and compulsory basic education provision.

This project provided funding for supplementary food to prevent malnutrition among children and give students a better chance to learn without being hungry. The STAND-UP project also supported nursery school monitoring and communication. Each Nursery School prepared a nutritious meal each day. The nursery school also cultivated a climate of basic care by teaching them physical and mental care. There has been a lot of attention and focus on creating a safe environment for the students where the teachers ensure all students are comfortable, and so the parents do not have to worry.

Over the last two years, KWO has conducted a significant amount of training intended to regularly develop and improve the education project.

### **Special Education (SE)**

The special education (SE) project has been operating for almost twenty-years and aims to achieve the basic rights of all children and youth living with disabilities in Karen refugee camps, as well as work to enable them to take part in community life. We support children and youth with disabilities and their families by providing care and educational services available to them and attempting to strengthen community awareness and acceptance.

The SE project has four main components:

1. Early Intervention with young children and disability (home visits and learning centre)
2. Inclusive Education (up to Standard 2 in mainstream schools, SE centres and home visits)
3. School for students with hearing impairments in six camps only
4. School for students with visual impairments in two camps only

KWO runs classes for children with disabilities who come to the center and study there. For those who cannot come, there is a tailored individual plan where the teacher does the home visit and provided the children with care at home. The SE project is currently running in seven camps, with 282 female and 343 male students totaling 625 children with disabilities receiving services, better care by their parents and support from the community. The SE program in Karen State runs in one IDP and five sites in three districts. It serves 116 girls and 149 boys and has 8 area coordinators, 10 central staff with 90 women and 14 men total of 104 staff. KWO distributes quarterly hygiene packs to children with disabilities including soap, toothpaste, toothbrush and talcum powder. Play sessions are run at each SE Centre for groups of children in the Early Intervention program once or twice a week depending on the availability of the students and parents.

The SE project is unique in the sense that in addition to assisting the physical and mental needs of disabled children, staff also work to raise awareness among parents and the community about the rights of children to ensure they have a better understanding of their child's needs. In Karen culture, disabilities are not well understood. Families are often blamed for having a child with a disability and communities assume this a result of bad behavior in a past life, and that the child's needs are a punishment. KWO challenges these beliefs through community education workshops for a half day on topics including child rights, supporting children with disabilities, inclusive education, nutrition and hygiene. Community education workshops are held 16 times in Karen State and six times in the refugee camps. Attendees of the workshops include parents of disabled children, neighbors, carers, other parents, mainstream school teachers and community leaders. In the camps, 184 participated in 2018 and in Karen State 696 people joined.

In 2018 and 2019, SE teachers in the camps were all provided with regular training by camp-based trainers, guest trainers or town-based project staff. Training is relevant to the work the SE staff do and the needs of the students who have various disabilities. Training includes types and causes of disability, how to prevent disability, autism, down syndrome and how to work with children who have disabilities learn and write lesson plans.

Through various community awareness days, KWO also works to break stereotypes that typically undermine the potential and abilities of students in the SE project. Some of these days include International Deaf Day, International Day for the Blind, International Day of the Disabled, Christmas and New Year and other event invitations from SE students in the community with 3645 attendees from the camps and in Karen State.



## Dormitories

Active conflict in Burma has forced many families to make tough decisions on the best way to secure the future of their children. One of the many difficult choices includes how to ensure access to a sustainable education that is inexpensive and will allow their children to learn and grow in a safe environment. KWO operates dormitories in Mae La refugee camp and six districts in Karen State. Children who stay in the dormitories are between the ages of 7 and 23. In Karen State, there were 768 dormitory students, and in Mae La there were 33 students from 2018. In 2019, there were 26 students in Mae La and 832 in the districts. KWO has had to scale down the dormitory project as funding becomes more limited. We have also had to stop taking in new students but continue to support them at home or at the homes of their relatives.

KWO provides emotional and material support to the dormitory students which includes housing, clothing, food and assistance with their studies. Students receive hygiene packages, warm clothes, study supplies including a notebook, writing tool and candle, bed mats, blankets, mosquito nets, supplementary nutritional food to add to the camp rations. KWO covers the school fees to ensure the students are able to have access to education. Providing the care services is one-full time KWO staff member who works in accordance with the Care for Dormitories - a document which was developed by KWO with children and community leaders through a participatory process in 2008.

## Unaccompanied Children

For students who are not living in the dormitories, KWO supported 106 students living with their parents or caretakers in the camp to ensure they can continue their studies in 2018 and 94 in 2019. Due to a decrease in sponsorship, the number in 2019 was lower. KWO provides support as needed and meets families regularly to ensure the child is being cared for and looked after safely.

Ideally, students would stay with their parents and families, but there are no schools in some of the villages where students come from, so they have to travel to another location and stay with relatives. Some of the students come from very poor families who are not able to support their education, or from families with several children. KWO believes that education should not mean parental separation. The unaccompanied children project seeks to provide students staying with other relatives the same access to education. We cover the school fees and provide basic hygiene products. KWO does regular monitoring to ensure they will stay in good and safe conditions.

## **Karen Young Women's Leadership School (KYWLS)**

**1**

**YEAR  
PROGRAM**

**18-30**

**WOMEN'S  
AGES**

**5**

**DISTRICTS**

**37**

**GRADUATES  
2018-19**

With a goal of empowering and encouraging young women to see and achieve their leadership potential through engaged participation, the Karen Young Women's Leadership School (KYWLS) supports women in decision-making opportunities. The school, which was founded in 2001, is a one-year program for young women who are interested in working with organizations in their communities. The program provides women with skills and new knowledge on topics including community development and management, human rights, women's and child rights, basic law, administrative skills, information collection and documentation (library skills/documentation skills), women and leadership, Karen history and politics and Burmese and English language, reading and research skills, leadership skills and practical life-skills such as weaving, sewing, embroidery, typing and cooking). A specific focus has been made on indigenous rights and Karen feminism following a decision made in 2019 by the KWO Central Standing Committee.

The women, who are aged between 18 and 30 years old come to study from refugee camps and five districts in Karen State as well as KWO Central representatives. Between 2018 and 2019, 37 students graduated from KWYLS where many will go on to work alongside other community-based organizations in their community. As a result of this training, many have been elected to leading positions at the district and camp level.

In 2018, KWO conducted a four-week TOT with 13-trainers to increase teaching quality and review the curriculum, which needed to be updated to address current developments in Burma's human rights situation, as well as developments in CBO work. A new school, teacher's house and guest teacher home was also built to increase the space available for training and housing. Every year, KWO reviews and adapts the curriculum to match the context of Burma's current situation with a gender perspective.

In 2019, we organized a KWYLS reunion with 74 alumni from all the years the project has been running which included 16 groups and over 200 graduates.



## Changes & Developments in 2019

In 2019 KWO took part in the development of the final version of a Child Protection Referral system for refugee camps with other stakeholders working in the refugee camps. Through our network of the Karen and Karenni Education Stakeholders Team, we had three meetings and developed the Refugees and Ethnic Students Transition to ethnic and government school policy, which was approved in December. In 2020, we plan to develop a policy recognizes ethnic education systems and also have it approved. We plan to attend different forums on ethnic education and meetings to continue to advocate for these policies to be implemented and accepted by government and ethnic leaders.



## Social Welfare

KWO works to support the needs of women and children by resolving social problems to ensure their protection and above all create a safe environment for them within our capacity in the existing community system. There were 11, 296 beneficiaries of the social welfare program with KWO working to address areas of concern including sexual and gender-based violence, unemployment, extreme poverty, caring for the most vulnerable (elderly, disabled, widowed, orphaned children), building confidence and engaging with survivors of violence from the military, supporting women's access to justice with the Karen administration as well as in Burma. Networks in Karen civil society strengthen the support that KWO is able to provide to overcome the many increasing challenges that have come with reductions in cross-border aid. KWO is recognized as an advocate for women and child rights and access to justice. Our community looks to our leadership when they need protection and support.

We take on the responsibilities of social work by serving as a mediator in times of conflict and disagreement in the community. Through informal capacities, KWO is responsible for resolving social problems that may arise, which includes doing social-work related tasks as we are seen as community-caregivers. KWO leaders have agreements that in exchange for this work, they are given more opportunities to speak in leadership capacities.

KWO advocates and lobbies for equality and better services by working with relevant stakeholders including the KNU.

Policy and legislative change are important and contributions from the women's perspective strengthen protection mechanisms through enforcement and accountability. We are deeply involved in the concerns and challenges faced by the community and work to provide guidance in formal and informal capacities by organizing social welfare related activities and regularly taking part in home visits.

Under the social welfare program in 2018, there were 5264 women who attended a training, a workshop or women's discussions to increase their knowledge of their rights.

In 2019 KWO was able to provide training to 290 project staff and position holders within KWO specializing on social work.

Although, 2018 was an exceptionally challenging year for this program because of flooding in several places and IDPs who needed support, we extended all efforts to support new cases of SGBV. KWO remains focused on increasing resources to improve the Karen justice system to women and children in our community so that they have access to protection mechanisms that are accountable to their needs. Improving these systems supports our overall goal of establishing a federal union in the future. We believe that for federalism to work, we must have strong state governance and work towards strengthening our State institutions.

## Social Welfare Projects

### Safe Houses and Women's Protection Strengthening Women's Survivors Income Generation Project

#### Safe Houses and Women's Protection

The Safe House and Women's Protection (SHWP) project exists to provide support and services and advocacy to women and children who are suffering from different forms of sexual and gender-based violence. We provide safe shelter and support services in the Karen refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border and in Karen state for vulnerable women and children, in particular survivors of sexual or gender-based violence.

In 2018, KWO ran 13 safe houses in seven camps. In 2019, KWO ran 12 safe houses in seven camps. The safe houses are intended to provide a safe shelter for young women and girls and their families who have been exposed to gender-based violence. They operate with the support of two-full time carers sharing 24-hour shifts, seven days a week. They are in regular communications with security officials if a threat at any time arises that undermines the safety of the women staying in the safe house. Survivors staying in the KWO safe house are provided regular, ongoing care including counselling, case-managing and are provided with legal counsel through camp or Thai judicial systems if they request it. The services are also provided to survivors who stay at their homes. The carer and field staff make sure to visit regularly.

KWO SH WP staff also provide material assistance to women and young girls staying at home and are visited regularly to ensure the status of their mental and physical well-being is in good status. Young children in particular who have family members addicted to drugs or alcohol are at an increased risk of neglect and malnutrition. The funding reduction to different kinds of social services in the camps and pressure for refugee return remain the two main issues that are of concern for people in the camps.



KWO SH WP staff also provide material assistance to women and young girls staying at home and are visited regularly to ensure the status of their mental and physical well-being is in good status. Young children in particular who have family members addicted to drugs or alcohol are at an increased risk of neglect and malnutrition. The funding reductions to different kinds of social services in the camps and pressure for refugee return remain the two main issues that are of concern for people in the camps. There are still a lot of people who feel they are not being provided with enough information to decide on their futures. This overwhelming sense of fear and uncertainty contributes to low self-esteem and high levels of depression. KWO makes sincere efforts to do home visits in the camps to talk with families and individuals about their situation and get feedback on the best way to support them. For women in particular, KWO encourages them to speak out if they need counseling so they are not isolated from the community.

*Survivors staying in the KWO safe house are provided regular, ongoing care including counselling, case-managing and are provided with legal counsel through camp or Thai judicial systems if they request it. The services are also provided to survivors who stay at their homes. The carer and field staff make sure to visit regularly.*

In the refugee camps, each camp conducts two women's discussion sessions and most of the participants are female students, vulnerable women including those who are dealing with drug and alcohol addiction, KWO members and other general women in our community. Most of the topics that they discussed were domestic violence, gender awareness and women's protection. Through these discussions women and girls learn more about gender roles and how stereotypes can hold communities back. They also discussed the causes of domestic violence and how to assist those who suffer as a result of abuse. There was an interest in learning more about protection mechanisms, and where to receive this type of information to protect themselves. They shared that the more they learned about this topic, they became more knowledgeable on basic self-protection as well as for those around them.

The project management meetings helped the project teams to review their work on what has been done and not done, discussed challenges and alternative options for solutions and then make improvements as needed.

Women also remain more at risk of gender-based violence. As a result, KWO works hard to advocate for women's protection mechanisms to be strengthened as well as to provide information on the rights of women and children by reinforcing the zero-tolerance policy of any type of violence. For those suffering from serious trauma, they will be unable to communicate their pain and needs immediately so KWO is always mindful of approaching survivors sensitively to attend to their needs in a way that is best suited to their cases. The increase in substance abuse of drugs and alcohol in the three Tak camps has been an area of concern as both men and women are at risk of being influenced by

the addiction. Outreach and awareness will continue to be done with the community to work towards decreasing the abuse and supporting those who are trying to quit and recover from the habit's impacts on themselves, their families and the environment. KWO always makes sure that all victims of SGBV have access to KWO Safe Houses, regardless of their background, beliefs and social status. KWO also respects all decisions made by the victims and supports them in their choices to stay at the Safe House or in their own homes.

KWO regularly advocates for survivors of sexual-gender based violence (SGBV) by raising awareness within communities to encourage people to work together to protect the dignity of survivors and to ensure access to justice. Our project activities are met with a positive response from the community, camp-based organized, victims and camp leadership. By providing survivors with access to legal channels for justice as well as supporting their physical and mental needs for their overall well-being, our beneficiaries were protected. When survivors come to the Safe House or seek support at home, KWO provides counseling and recognizes that different cases require different types of approaches and responses. For survivors with children, KWO caretakers make sure the children attend school and help them with their homework. The most important thing for survivors is that their security is upheld and prioritized, which KWO ensures. By working with other community-based organizations, KWO can support survivors more by referring them to stakeholders with more expertise and access to the resources they require.



*A trust-building activity at one of the survivor workshops*

# Program Achievements

1

## **Advocating for women and children in the justice system**

KWO was involved with 333 cases in 2018. In 2019, we supported and advocated for 179 victims. There were 275 women beneficiaries and 9 young boys. The majority of these involved KWO advocating for women and children to get services, protection, security, fairness and justice.

2

## **Women's Rights Awareness**

There were 1325 participants in 2018 and 25,078 in 2019 for the women's discussion sessions held monthly to increase their knowledge on gender-based violence, gender equality, human rights, domestic violence, women's health, reproductive health and women's protection. KWO Case Managers take care of survivors.

3

## **Traditional Skills**

112 women learned the handicraft skills of sewing, weaving and embroidering through KWO's Income Generation Project.

4

## **Safe Houses and Women's Protection Project**

11, 296 people benefited from the KWO Safe House and women's protection project. This includes those who stayed at safe houses, received case management services, attended training or attended awareness raising events.

5

## **Case Management**

Direct support to 156 cases of violence in the community with 455 females and 204 males (mostly children) for a total of 659 people who received help with case management, services, counselling, materials support and advocate at the justice system.

6

## **16 Days of Activism**

In 2019, the 16 of Activism Against Gender Based Violence activities took place in 16 sites in Karen State and Refugee Camps in 2019 from 25 November to 10 December with a total of 14,815 beneficiaries.

7

#### **Women's Protection Discussion**

These activities bring success for our organization as we see more and more women joining who grow their knowledge in basic human rights, women's rights, gender equality, basic health and related KWO values. The more women join, the more their knowledge they can use to empower themselves to be in a better position to advocate for their needs and concerns.

8

#### **Supporting Victimss**

People in our community recognize the role of KWO in supporting victims through physical and emotional care. KWO also attempts to advocate for justice through various legal channels at the camp, district and township level.

9

#### **Survivor Organizing**

119 women survivors of SGBV received support and training in self-care, increased their skills, knowledge, and leadership skills training.

10

#### **Ongoing Provision of Emergency Care**

Ongoing, regular support ensures the most vulnerable people in our community are provided for by working closer with other community stakeholders.

11

#### **Contributed to an update of Kawthoolie law approval**

This includes changes based on KWO inputs that called for fair punishment against those who have committed crimes and for clarity in the law so that the community understands the laws.

*A photo from the 16 Days of Activism Campaign.*



### 16-Days of Activism

Every year from November 25 to December 10, the 16 Days of Activism Campaign takes place to provide visibility to the epidemic of violence against women and girls in various forms. The international campaign amplifies voices from women's organizations, allies and networks to share one, unified message—that violence against women is never acceptable and should not be tolerated. In 2018, there were 5,992 participants and in 2019 KWO saw 14,815 participants.

November 25 is a very important day for organizations and leaders to remind communities that violence is never the answer to domestic disputes. The KWO 2019 theme of 'Use Your Power to Protect' was shared in our awareness materials to give the message that power should be used responsibly – and that stakeholders responsible for carrying out justice should do so in the survivor's interest. We also used our message to inform everyone that they all have power and should use it to support those who are in trouble or need support. KWO continues to advocate for women's access to justice and the rule of law. Domestic violence impacts everyone, and the consequences of not being informed can negatively impact children, neighbors and the overall community. An important part of the awareness raising KWO believes in is the participation and cooperation of men. We encourage men to work with us as allies and support our message of zero tolerance of gender-based violence.

It is therefore crucial that communities are aware of laws on women's protection and how to communicate their needs for a safe environment, free from violence, threats, intimidation and any type of harm.

## Strengthening Women Survivors

The Strengthening Women Survivors (SWS) project aims to strengthen and empower women survivors of violence in post conflict transition period in Karen State, Burma. This is done through several different ways including meetings, training, exchanges, forums and events.

In 2018, SWS activities took place between January and November in eight townships with 117 beneficiaries. These activities included a capacity building workshop on gender equality and women's rights with participants from Doo Pla Yar and Doo Tha Htu districts. It also included participating in the launch of the AJAR joint report, 'Speaking Truth for Peace,' as well as a movement building workshop. Three survivor exchanges took place in September, October and November. Survivor exchanges include trust building activities where they are able to share their experiences through team building, discussions, storytelling and lifestyle mapping.

Five data-collection workshops through a participatory action research approach took place in 2019 between June and October in five townships. A survivor gathering was also held toward the end of 2019 with the 145 beneficiaries. The significance of the data collection workshops and training is that it helps the survivors to open up about their experiences in a safe environment. These exchanges show that they are not alone in their hard times. With their consent, with the data collected we can use this as evidence for advocacy in getting recognition of the role of women leaders in conflict.

## Income Generation Project

KWO's income generation project (IGP) aims to empower Karen refugee women to generate income for themselves and their families. It is also a unique way to uphold the Karen history through traditional weaving methods. The project staff provide advanced training in sewing and weaving for women in the camps as a means to build their capacity and economically empower them. Women who participate in the training become skilled at producing beautiful garments of high quality. The project is active in Mae La, Umphiem, Noh Poe. KWO provides materials to camp-based staff to give to the women producing the handicrafts, which they are in turn able to generate a profit from.

KWO established this project in order to assist women and girls to build up their capacity and knowledge skills including sewing, weaving, and embroidery. However, we also see it is important for women and girls to be more aware of their rights, protections and what is happening in their community. Over the last two-years, KWO has focused on two main activities, which include providing life skills to women and girls and women's discussion activities. Life skill activities were carried out in Mae La camp with a focus on weaving and embroidery skills workshops and practical activities.

In 2018, KWO conducted four training sessions on the topic of women and embroidery, weaving and advancing weaving and quality control training with 112 participants interested in advancing their skills and improving their livelihoods through embroidery. Awareness raising sessions on women's protection issues were included.



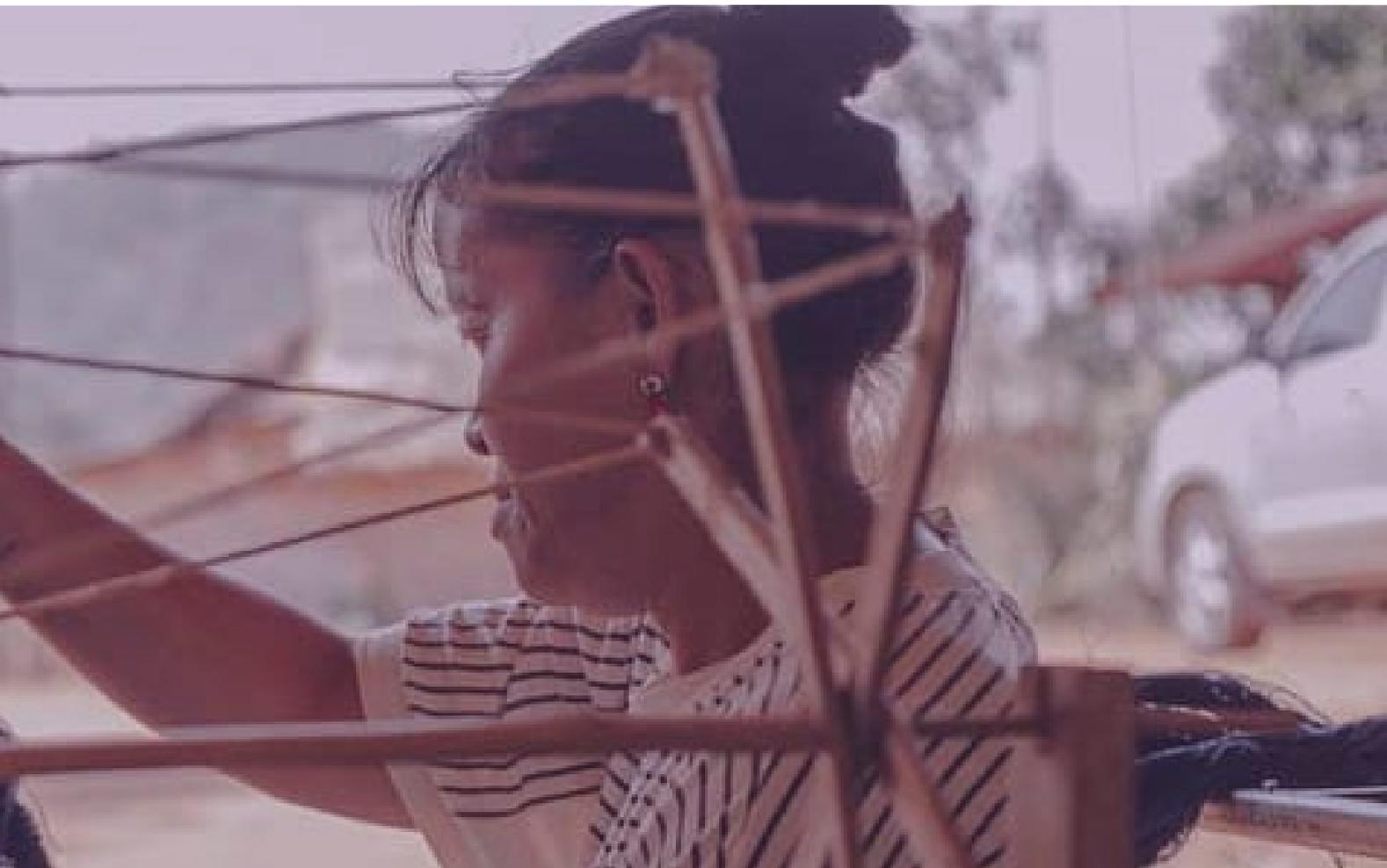
After the training, KWO camp staff provided raw materials to participants to practice their skills. The weaving and embroidery training is 15 to 20 days with regular practicing after the training for at least three months.

KWO also provided a three-day intensive training on quality control for 30-women in Mae La camp twice. This training includes quality control, color management, product design and development, marketing and small business skills. KWO camp-based staff also included awareness raising topics focusing on women's protection issues. At the end of the training, participants have an increased knowledge and continue to develop their skills in their interested areas and produce better products.

All materials made are sold in the Mae Sot Resource Centre. The funds generated are spent in two different ways - the first is equal and fair distribution to the women in the camp who are creating the products and secondly to cover project materials and running costs for the shop.

KWO has also recently been meeting with local Mae Sot businesses with the goal of selling products in various guest-houses and restaurants in the town to earn and generate a more regular income from the products.

**Photo credit:** Gioia Emidi "Getting ready to spin the yarn"



# Changes & Developments in 2019

KWO was a leading contributor in the drafting of the Child Protection Referral System (an ongoing process) for Karen State with other stakeholders who work in Karen State. Additionally, in order to strengthen the existing justice system and bring justice to women and girls, KWO rolled out an ARM/SOP guideline workshop in all of the seven districts with relevant stakeholders to ensure we are working towards the same goals and objectives needed to support victims as needed. Regular communication also ensures that our work is not duplicated and increases capacity for better collaboration.

Our membership of women along the border and inside Karen State means that there is work being done in an informal capacity to support women, children and communities and their respective needs. KWO representatives from camps, villages, townships and districts levels initiate and lead most of the events related to the community including Karen celebrations, religious days and cultural events. They assist in formal and informal capacities by helping to prepare for events, organize and share information. For others they support with social work activities through home-visits to vulnerable community members by giving encouragement, helping with the chores and household duties to sick families and individuals, providing hygiene items, washing their clothes, accompanying them to the hospital, assisting them with access to other services, as well as helping during funerals and weddings. KWO's membership is quickly increasing as we work to ensure members are actively supporting our work.

KWO's extended membership lends itself to be available and flexible to meet the various needs in the community. Our advocacy seeks to raise the awareness of the conditions women and children face in sexual gender-based violence circumstances. By providing information and emotional support to at-risk individuals, we are able to advise as necessary on a case-by-case basis. We encourage women to report instances of adultery, sexual harassment and those seeking a divorce and to build their capacity whenever it is possible for KWO to facilitate through various forms of therapy.

We also advocated and participated in the KNU justice department consultations through workshops to raise our concerns about proposed changes for development from our perspective. We expanded our Women Survivors project activities in two districts in 2019 and conducted a survivor's exchange in October 2019 with a total of 72 participants with women survivors and KWO representatives from the refugee camps and Karen State to exchange information and learn from each other. There were total of 146 SWS project beneficiaries in 2019.

We also conducted Women Protection TOT training at districts and camp levels in the six districts of Karen State and two camps to encourage participation of women from various townships. There was a total of 223 women who joined the district TOT and after that they went back to their represented areas and provided 142 women discussions

in 7 districts and 5 camps with a total of 5978 participants.

KWO's leadership strives to set an example of what is possible when women come together united in a common goal to support their communities. Stereotypes have long held women back from achieving their potential, which is why it is even more important for KWO leaders to speak truth to power and challenge what is traditionally expected of women.

*Photo credit: Fund for Global Human Rights*





## Advocacy & Networking

## **International & Regional Advocacy**

**2018**

KWO General Secretary, Naw K'ynaw Paw, travelled to the United States to attend a global meeting of Karen leaders and to meet with resettled Karen communities in the USA.

**2019**

In 2019, she travelled to the United States once again to receive the Women of Courage award as well as Canada and Australia to have meetings as part of a speaking tour. She met with the Karen community in these areas. In addition to these activities, she met with staff at the UN in order to advocate for a Security Council resolution calling for the referral of the Burmese Generals to the International Criminal Court. She also met with numerous potential and current donors in an effort to maintain relationships and find new donors. She was successful in establishing one new donor.

### **Networking with Karen Organisations and Civil Society Organizations**

KWO networks with Karen civil-society groups including the Karen Human Rights Group, Karen Peace Support Network, Karen River's Watch and the Karen Grassroots Women's Network (among many others) to amplify the concerns of our community at the local, regional and international levels. These close working relationships increases the potential for KWO to have an impact in the areas we are working in.

KWO is a founding member of the Women's League of Burma, an umbrella network organization with the aim of increasing the participation of women in the struggle for democracy and human rights, promoting women's participation in the national peace and reconciliation process, and enhancing the role of the women of Burma at the national and international level.

KWO also networked with Asia Pacific Refugees Rights Network by advocating with them for refugees' rights by attending seminars, training and workshops. This networking allows us a platform to raise the voices and concerns of refugees to a broader audience. This relationship has expanded our reach to other network communities worldwide to show our solidarity and support.

The main issues that KWO and networks faced in 2019 included:

## *Lack of community participation & consultation in the peace process*

We have reinforced our commitments to indigenous people's rights including:



*Land, Development & Environmental Rights*

Low levels of women's participation across social and political sectors was an area of advocacy KWO and networks continues to address and is advocating for visibility and funding for the plight of refugees and IDPs. KWO and various other civil society-organizations work closely together to coordinate and strategize the most effective means to support our community needs and vocalize their concerns to stakeholders in appeals for funding.

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KWO's membership is quickly increasing as we work with members to maximize our impact.

## Stalled Peace Process

Despite the challenges that KWO experiences we remain committed to our work and running our programs as best as we can, given the limitation in resources and funding. Notably, the failure of the peace process has brought forward mass instability for the people in our community. It has threatened their safety, livelihood opportunities and protection concern on specific issues. Where the peace process has strengthened government administered areas by providing support to basic services, structures in ethnic areas that have been well established and developed for decades, are now having to deal with the threats of development projects and expansion undermining access to their land in already heavily militarized areas. Civilians living in these areas end up being forcibly displaced when their safety is threatened. Clashes between the armed groups who have already signed the NCA, affect the local people who are living in these areas. Women and children are at an increased risk of experiencing sexual abuse by the many armed actors as well as those who come into their areas for development. Conflict areas are unstable and lessen the likelihood that women and children will have access to getting help and justice.

## Pressure on IDPs/Refugees to Return

In terms of a dignified return to Burma for refugees living in camps along the Thai-Burma border, the current situation is not right for refugees to go back as there is no guarantee for safety or political rights. Less than 1000 people have returned to Burma for fear of unstable conditions from 2018 and 2019. Inside the refugee camps conditions are rapidly deteriorating with reduced rations and a lack of socio-economic opportunities. Further, the delays to talks and negotiations related to the peace process has resulted in a sincere lack of trust by local people. KWO works for the people and we will continue to use our capacity to make use of safe spaces to meet with men and women and share updates on the situation as requested. We will also continue to encourage them to make decisions that are in their best interests by providing information to dignify them in the process of making choices themselves.

In 2019, KWO leaders at central and camps level continued to advocate for refugee rights to be respected and for humanitarian aid to be delivered to refugees and for refugees to have ownership in the decision process on returning or staying in the camps. We shared their concerns to diplomats, Thai NGOs, INGOs and UNHCR to advocate to the Thai government to provide legal documents to refugees so they can work outside of camp and support their families.

## Safety & Security of Women Human Rights Defenders at Risk

KWO's women leaders, case managers and staff supporting survivors of SGBV or those who have suffered additional human-rights violations face ongoing challenges – including threats to their lives. This is a serious challenge that KWO has had to face at all levels in our advocacy for support to women and children for justice. KWO now has a safety plan for women leaders, case managers and staff and have encouraged survivors to also come up with a safety plan. The safety of women falls to all of us – as well as stakeholders who work to provide different types of communication services and coordinate with other relevant non-government organizations and agencies.

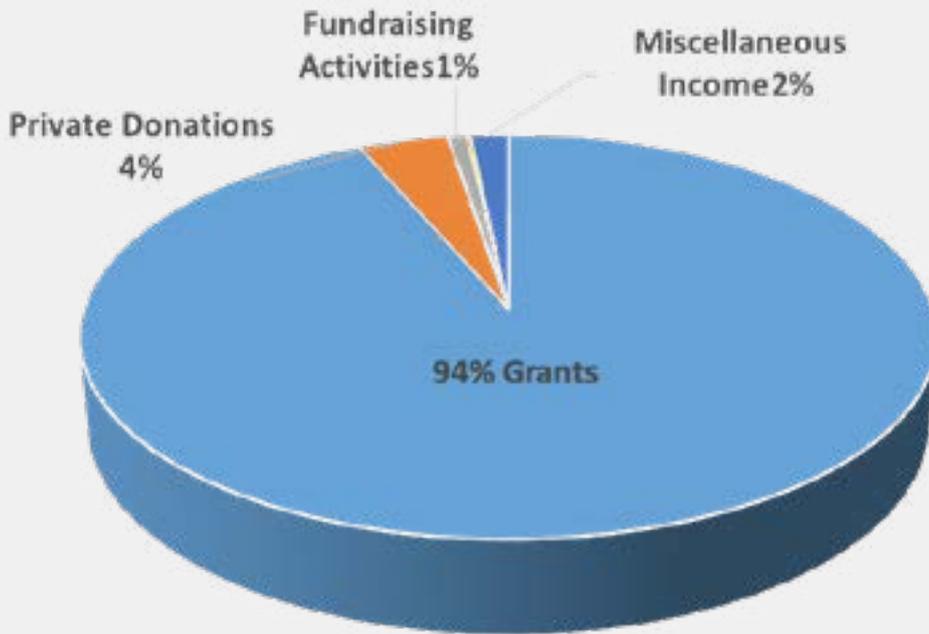
## Program Funding Reductions

Funding opportunities sincerely limit the amount of work KWO is able to do. As we are not a registered organization it is harder to secure long-term funding, even though we have been working for over 30-years and have such work recognized by the community. Many of the new funders/donors we are in the process of applying to have significant reporting requirements which post a challenge as we are an organization with limited capacity. Differences in funding priorities also result in communication challenges. Nonetheless, we work tirelessly to build and sustain community fundraising activities.

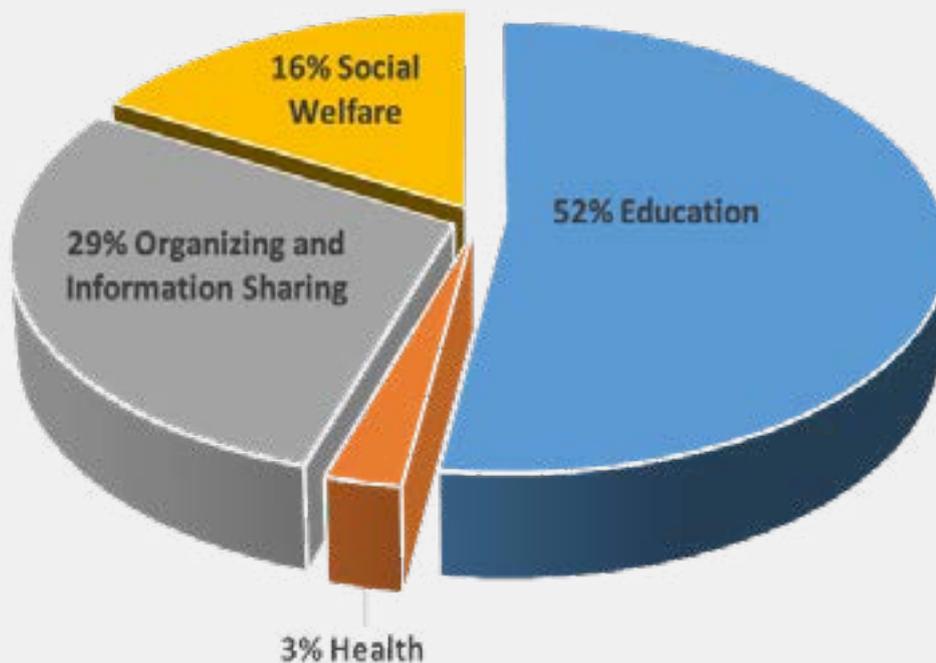
Despite these challenges, KWO feels a responsibility to meet the needs of our community in any way we can. We are made stronger in our solidarity and shared struggles as believe that having a supportive space that is women-to-women with understanding co-workers makes all the work and difficult times possible to work through.

# Finance & Accounting

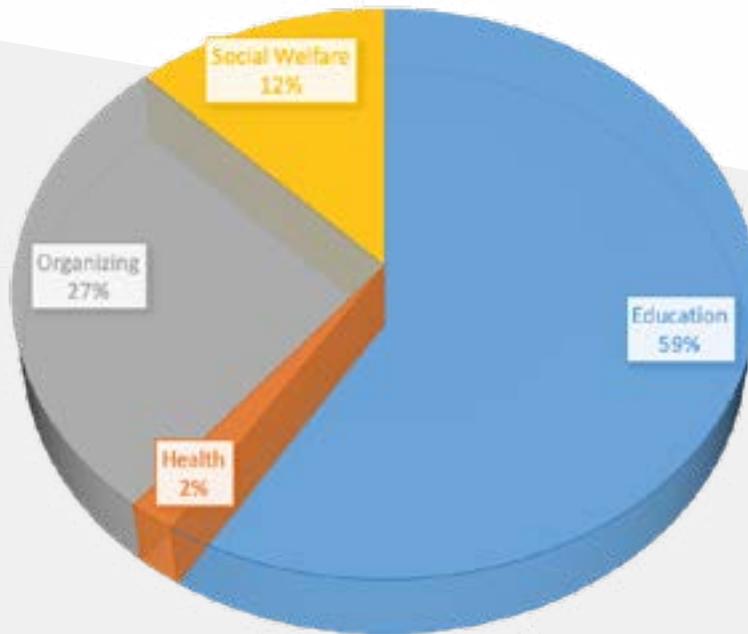
## 2018 KWO Income by Source



## 2018 KWO Expenses by Program Total: \$1, 100, 247 USD



## 2019 KWO Income by Program



## 2019 KWO Revenue



KWO's income and expenses are primarily from grants and contributions. We have successfully found new donors as funds have been cut but it gets harder each year. We are enduringly grateful for the support our community receives. KWO continues to be recognized as an organization that does what it commits to and serves our community with minimal overhead. We are proud of that effort even while it gets ever more difficult.



## Future Plans

*Within our four-program areas, our future plans to develop and grow our programs are as follows:*

## EDUCATION

Continue to provide and advocate for children and youth for access to education and basic support for children and look for more funding opportunities.

Continue to work on KWO Education Program guidelines and develop a lesson plan for it to be used in the TOT workshop where we will bring all the education program coordinators together from seven districts in Karen State

Continue to advocate for the recognition of the KWO nursery school under the mainstream education system with the Karen Education and Culture Department.

Continue to improve KWO's child protection policy.

Review and develop school curriculums, teaching guidelines, lesson plans and other teaching aid materials for education projects as needed.

Conduct different kinds of TOT training for program project staff in the areas where they need to build up their skills and capacity.

Create more activities for KWO members and so that they are empowered to build up the grassroots women's movement.

## HEALTH

Continue to look for possible donors as now we do not have full support

KWO will continue to manage and implement the women's health projects including TBA and Baby Kits within our capacity, even with the gaps in funding support.

Continue to provide awareness raising training especially on awareness related to nutritional food, basic women's and children's health care, cleanliness and other preventable acts for a healthy life and living environment.

Conduct regular program meetings to do the planning and sharing updates on preparation.

Strive to find a way to support those who are vulnerable and have health emergencies that require access to basic health care and treatment by advocating on their behalf to relevant stakeholders.

Organize more home visits and health awareness activities that include talking to women and children about basic health care, family planning, adolescent health, hygiene and the use of toilet and other general basic health awareness information for preventable diseases.

## SOCIAL WELFARE

Continue to support victims and women and children at risk with holistic support.

Review and update project related teaching guidelines, lesson plans and training manuals for capacity building of our project team members from fields to central level.

Continue to work on and finalize the child protection policy based on some of the donor's requests and recommendations.

Finalize the KNU Violence Against Women Law and Child Protection Law and cooperate with relevant stakeholders to get it approved and put it into action/practice.

Establish a plan to do online advocacy for women's empowerment, justice and continue supporting protection issues.

Strengthen and explore funding opportunities by organizing different kinds of fundraising activities from the local to the international level in order to fill funding gaps to continue to provide and support our community.

Expand KWO services and program activities to reach out to more women who are potential victims and survivors of SGBV or any forms of violence to ensure that they have access to basic protection and know and understand their own rights, know where and how to access to basic services and how to report the incident and get justice.

Continue to advocate and monitor the behavior of justice stakeholders and outcomes to make sure the justice system and procedures are followed, enforced and implemented at different levels.

Engage with UN body on strengthening accountability mechanisms to ensure the Burma Army is tried in civilian courts for their human-rights abuses and that survivors of violence have reliable access to transitional justice mechanisms.

## ORGANIZING & INFORMATION SHARING

Continue to build up our organizational capacity to have both technical and financial independence to ensure our organization is healthy and sustainable.

Continue to protect and promote KWO values such as equality, mutual respect, accountability, transparency, support community ownership, zero tolerance to any kinds of violence against women and children and acceptance of democratic principles.

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4

Continue to work on KWO membership data and membership cards.

Organize and conduct capacity building for KWO leaders at all levels, especially on the topics that related to politics and over all situation updates.

Continue our advocacy work with our networking groups on different issues to maintain our calls on continuation of cross border humanitarian aids, continue support for refugees and IDPs, supports international justice calls for transparency and accountability.

Continue to expand and improve KWO's website and Facebook to share updated information.

Sustain growth of KWO members movement at the local level (village, township, district and camp)

Continue to make sure women leaders participate at all levels of different sectors that are working and providing support or services for our community through political and non-political means.

Continue to speak out and stand for our values and principles, women's rights, democracy, federalism, feminism and indigeneous rights and show our solidarity to others when their rights are violated.

Work with our network to monitor development in Burma and the negative impacts to our community as well as work to hold corporate actors accountable for human rights committed in the name of investment, and further advocate for grassroots led development that focuses more on partnerships and the people, rather than profit.

Continue to document abuses by the Burma Army and release a report analyzing the impacts on our communities

Engage our members in a group discussion and raise awareness about their rights and responsibilities as active members of KWO

# Support KWO

## Volunteer with KWO

If you are interested in volunteering for a minimum of three months, we are looking for support in the following areas:

1. Teaching English as a foreign language
2. Technical expertise and experience in these particular areas: online sales and marketing, women's child protection law, and fundraising are currently of great need.

If you have expertise in these areas, please send us an email with your CV to [kwocentral@gmail.com](mailto:kwocentral@gmail.com). We accept both self-funded volunteers and those sponsored by an organization or University. If you wish to complete a research project while you are here, this will have to be agreed in advance of arrival.

## Fundraise for KWO

Due to funding cuts in all of the refugee camps, and a total ceasing of funds in Ee Htu Hta IDP Camp we are always very grateful for any donations that can be spared. These go towards providing nutritious lunches for children at nursery and in special education, contribute to our teacher's stipends so they can continue to give children chances for development, aid in material provision and logistics for Community Awareness sessions. You can either submit the funds raised by PayPal as a one-off payment, or transfer funds to our account. For details and to give us a heads up on expecting your donation (and so we can say thank you!) please do email us on: [kwocentral@gmail.com](mailto:kwocentral@gmail.com)

## Stand in Solidarity with KWO

Ask your Government not to support 'development' projects that result in incursions on ethnic owned land, raise the voice of activists who have been jailed in Burma and lobby for their release, reflect on what it may be like to have to leave your home and be confined to a refugee camp, talk about this with your friends and spread awareness.



*Photo credit: Fund for Global Human Rights*



KWO is an ethnic women's community-based organization that empowers women so they have capacity and power to solve their own problems and participate in decision-making that will affect their lives.

KWO participates in the struggle to stop all kinds of oppression of women and of children and provides support for communities in the Thai-Burma border and in Karen State, Burma.



**The Karen Women's Organization**  
[www.karenwomen.org](http://www.karenwomen.org)