

2014

Agriculture Farmer Federation of Myanmar **Annual Activity Report**

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Agriculture Farmer Federation of Myanmar

Annual Activity Report

Preamble

Despite facing several challenges in the last two years, the AFFM has achieved considerable success in establishing itself as a main partner in effecting change for agricultural workers within the Union of Myanmar. With tenacity, the AFFM has worked to improve industrial relations, encourage national tripartite dialogue, and facilitate social dialogue mechanisms.

Unionism is a new (and perceivably unfamiliar) concept for several members. In a misguided attempt to gain financial assistance, some AFFM members attended meetings seeking immediate monetary support; these members ultimately left the organization. Reasons for departure from the AFFM may have been attributed to futile hubris.

The AFFM continues to stand by its principle objectives and will maintain the confidences of core members as well as promote teamwork and collective leadership. This will be done to foster active participation that will lead to the restoration of a genuine and functioning democracy in Myanmar.

The AFFM is an affiliate of the IUF and has assisted in the written mandates of the IUF AP. The ILO Liaison officer and team, ILO Chief Technical Advisor of Freedom of Association and other ILO program for Myanmar are very helpful for the AFFM achievement of social justice. The AFFM convey it thanks to the IUF, IUF AP and ILO.

Economic and Social Situation

The AFFM enters each year with enthusiasm and optimism. Previous accomplishments and continued success have propelled Myanmar towards democratic governance and progress with political and structural development. At times, with the benefit of hindsight, that optimism has been misplaced – instances in which the conflict escalates or the economy stagnates.

In 2011, Myanmar's population was estimated at 60.6 million, with an annual growth rate of 1.3 per cent. Categorised as one of the poorest nations in Asia, a 2013 Human Development Report ranked the country at 149 among the 186 nations rated, with a Human Development Index of 0.498. Based on socioeconomic indicators and Human Development Index ratings, Myanmar is classified as a *Least Developed Country* (LDC) under United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) criteria. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Myanmar was worth USD 6.46 billion in 1998 and reached nearly USD 54 billion in 2012, as reported by the World Bank. The GDP value of Myanmar represents 0.09 percent of the world economy.

Myanmar is the largest country in South East Asia, with rich endowments of land and water, and favourable climates for agriculture. The agricultural sector (including livestock and fisheries) is considered to be the backbone of the economy, and some 70 per cent of the labour force is engaged in agriculture or depends to a great extent on agriculture for income.

Rice is the most important crop, accounting for about 60 per cent of the net sown area and 80 per cent of the value of sector production. The sector accounts for some 25 - 30 per cent of the total value of exports. Pulses are currently the key export commodity, with an export value of USD 1.4 billion, while rice, rubber and fisheries exports each generate between USD 300 million and USD 400 million per year (2010 - 2011).

Despite its potential for growth, the agricultural sector has chronically suffered from insufficient investments in research, extension, technology transfer, and infrastructure development, value chain upgrading and marketing. Furthermore, farmers have not received remunerative prices for their products due to structural reasons as well as the lack of recognised policies, leading to declining rural incomes. Paradoxically, there is a strong association between agriculture and poverty, and a stark rural -urban divide. While the country produces a surplus of food, many rural areas suffer from chronic and acute food insecurity. These disparities exist among and within states, within village tracts and within villages, where household food insecurity and poverty are closely linked.

The index previously described, identifies a system that is broken, and though 'band-aids' have been applied, the wounds of injustice are deep and have scarred several sectors and groups within the nation. In recent years there has been a great deal of talk regarding the change in Myanmar – suggesting significant progress in respect to the freedom of association (including freedom of expression); however, many injustices still persist and appear (*nearly*) impervious to the actions of trade unions (e.g. collective bargaining).

Several actors may be intimidated by the democratic transition, as evident in the current political structure; Myanmar's power is still centralized and the main ministry is interior. Measures have been taken to put restrictions on the rights of union citizens. For example, in some instances if a trade union desires to organize a meeting or training, said union must seek the permission of the local administrative department (General Administrative Office) as declared under the recommendation of Labour Organization Law and in accordance with the ILO convention 87 Freedom of Association. This validates the assertion, local administrative bodies effect influence on other departments which are directly controlled by the interior ministry of the union government.

Trade unions are autonomous organizations, whose ability to flourish depends on the capability of the organization to meet the needs of the workers, as well as to establish efficacy within its representative functions – which includes, but is not limited to collective bargaining. It is in this context that the AFFM seeks to strengthen its organizational capacities at the grassroots level and develop the powers for organizing, launching effective collective bargaining, and creating social dialogue to advance shared protection of small farmers and agricultural workers.

Although, legislation does afford rural workers the right to unionise, this only applies to applicants residing in their hometown village, and is not applicable to workers who migrate to work out of their home village.

Furthermore, additional restrictions preclude several individuals from receiving benefits. Some small farmers and agricultural workers do not possess an identity card, despite having lived in Myanmar for the entirety of their lives; these persons are unable to join the union.

Apart from the issue of identification cards, individuals are required to have a letter of recommendation from an authority with land ownership. In some instances, when union leaders attempt to represent members in order to settle disputes on land rights, local officers refuse to recognise workers' representation – particularly, with issues related to land grabbing. Officials discourage individuals from joining trade unions and assert trade unions are “powerless” and unable to effect change. Additionally, individuals are discouraged from joining unions and are threatened with punitive measures if found attempting to do so.

Freedom of Association (Agriculture) and Union for Rural Worker

In accordance with article 19 of the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) by the **Agriculture and Farmer Federation of Myanmar (AFFM)** on the position of national law and practice in regard to matters dealt with in the following instruments:

- **RIGHT OF ASSOCIATION (AGRICULTURE) CONVENTION, 1921 (NO. 11)** adopted by the International Labour Conference at its Third Session (Geneva), 1921.
- **RURAL WORKERS' ORGANISATIONS CONVENTION, 1975 (NO. 141)** established in 1975 by the ILO.
- **RURAL WORKERS' ORGANISATIONS RECOMMENDATION, 1975 (NO. 149)** adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 60th Session (Geneva), 1975.

To rectify the current system and mitigate the effects of exploitation and governmental mistreatment of agricultural workers, the AFFM proposes that as part of the follow-up to the **Article 19 survey**, the ILO undertakes a number of activities, including:

- 1) Field work with the involvement of rural workers' organizations with an objective of helping rural workers in overcoming the obstacles in accessing legal support and rights; this is in relation to rural workers' right to join and to be represented by a trade union. Such development, particular attention should be given to women, migrants, seasonal, out-sourced and self-employed workers.
- 2) A study identifying any good practices that exists in relation to freedom of association for agricultural and rural workers.
- 3) A study considering the advantages of consolidating all relevant agricultural standards into a single instrument.
- 4) Endorsement and advancement of the ratification and application of the up-to date standards for agricultural and rural workers including the Labour Inspection in Agriculture Convention (No. 129).

Throughout its transitional period, the AFFM sought (and continues to seek) systematic formation to best achieve a functioning democracy. With three years of experience in collective leadership, teamwork activities, and successful completion of significant campaigns, the leaders of AFFM believe that it is time to review and amend the organization's constitution, policy, and current activities as a social partnership for tripartite dialogue that promotes for social justice in Myanmar. In addition, it is essential that younger members become more involved in the organization's operations as to guarantee new faces in AFFM leadership and ensure continuance in the organization's mission. It is for this reason, the AFFM executive committee members, standing committee members, and core members unanimously decided on 16th February 2014 to conduct the independent AFFM congress on the 29th and 30th of April 2014.

First Historic Congress of AFFM

- *Adoption the AFFM's Constitution*
- *Voting on membership dues*

The draft constitution was adopted by 1152 delegates. There were disputes regarding approving the 300 Kyats of monthly membership dues (allocating 100 Kyats to pay AFFM central body; another 100 Kyats for Township level union; and 100 kyats for basic union. Members are subject to a reduced 100 kyats at township union level if townships are not yet established). One delegate from Magway division challenged the payment and suggested his group allocate 100 kyat to the Central body and 200 Kyats to be spent for the basic union level before the township level is established. 274 votes were in support of this referendum (the provision that 200 kyats should be spent for the basic union level) and 85 votes were against; 20 were absent.



The Mandate of AFFM

Organize:

- ▶ Raising collective bargaining campaigns to approve '*the farm is only for growing*'
- ▶ Participating in the activity of Land Management Committee
- ▶ Establishing the committee for promoting technical support from international communities and local technician
- ▶ Participating in the workshop to respond to climate change
- ▶ Requesting technical support about OH&S from ILO, IUF to train the AFFM senior leaders as a training for trainers

Fight:

- ▶ Sending request letters to Union's parliament to advocate the adoption of the '*Farm is only for growing*' law
- ▶ Support the formation of a Crop Cooperative
- ▶ Set up a Seed Bank
- ▶ Support training for AFFM's affiliate unions about OH&S
- ▶ Campaign to ratify ILO Convention 184

Win:

- ▶ Declaration of *'the Farm is only for growing'*
- ▶ Improving land and crop research
- ▶ Supporting technical features and information regarding small farmers and agricultural workers
- ▶ AFFM and crop cooperatives jointly work to create a sustainable crop price
- ▶ Government produce a clear announcement of rules and regulations on using chemical products and industrial equipment for agriculture
- ▶ Making fair and just agreement with TNCs
- ▶ Improving production of sustainable food
- ▶ Small farmer and agricultural workers get a fair income and healthy foods

Major Challenges of AFFM

The AFFM is financially supported by membership dues. There is an obligatory monthly contribution of **100 kyats** per member. At present, the AFFM has **42,000 members**. If all members were to fully pay the dues of 100 kyats per person, the AFFM would receive **4,200,000 kyats = 4,200 USD** every month. In actuality, only 5 percent of core members contribute the full membership dues.

	Members	x	Fees	Total Dues Contributed
Estimated	42,000	x	100 kyats	4,200,000 kyats
Actual	210	x	100 kyats	2,100 kyats

The comments of members regarding membership dues are as follows:

- *'Other organizations can contribute and support the AFFM or agricultural workers'*
- *'There have been several backers that are able to help since the country opened'*
- *'As an AFFM member, why do we need to give our money to an organization that's suppose to help us?'*

This validates the position that several members are not familiar/ do not understand the underpinnings and structure of an independent organization.

Opportunities of AFFM

Freedom of association grants individuals the opportunity to join, leave, or form a union (for the protection of rights); the AFFM aspires to implement this principle across a broad spectrum. The organization will use the tools of freedom of association to organize and provide grantees with support, to further the transition of the country into a democratic nation.

State Structure and Division

Resolution

1. To increase the income of working men and women of the state/division
2. To achieve social justice for agricultural workers in the state/division according to national law
3. To initiate tripartite dialogue amongst government, employers, and unions
4. To exercise procedures according to regulations of the Occupational Health and Safety Environment
5. To work to improve food security in the state/division
6. To deter any form of discrimination in state/division
7. To preserve the traditions and customs of all ethnic nationalities within the State/division
8. To encourage young trade unionists in Myanmar and to communicate with the international trade union community

► Mon State



- **Timeline** 15th September 2014
- **Delegation**
 - ✓ (13) male and (8) female from Tha Htone Township
 - ✓ (12) male and (3) female from Paung Township
 - ✓ (7) male and (3) female from Ye Township
 - ✓ (1) male and (-) female from Chong Sone
- **Attendees** 100 people

Challenges

- Some resistance was met in regulating fee collection (e.g. 5000 kyats per month for each EC members). One challenger proposed collecting 10,000 kyats per month for each EC member. Another member proposed collecting 3,000 kyats per month for each EC member. Finally, 44 votes solidified the decision to collect 5,000 kyats per month for each EC member (2 red cards were in opposition).

Elected EC members

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) U Nay Win Tun | <i>President</i> | (ThaHtone Township) |
| 2) U Aung Mon | <i>Vice President</i> | (Ye Township) |
| 3) U Min MinNwe | <i>Secretary</i> | (Chong Sone Township) |
| 4) U Zaw Min Htike | <i>Assistant Secretary</i> | (Paung Township) |
| 5) Daw Kyi Kyi Khaing | | (Paung Township) |
| 6) U KyawMyint | | (ThaHtone) |
| 7) U TunLwin | | (Paung Township) |
| 8) U NyuntHlaing | | (Paung Township) |
| 9) U Tin Myint | | (Ye Township) |
| 10) Daw Than Htwe | | (ThaHtone) |
| 11) U Than Maung | | (ThaHtone) |
| 12) U NaingThein Aung | | (Chong Sone) |
| 13) Daw Khin Wine | | (Paung Township) |
| 14) U Kyaw Win | | (ThaHtone) |
| 15) U Min MinSoe | | (ThaHtone) |

► **KAREN STATE**

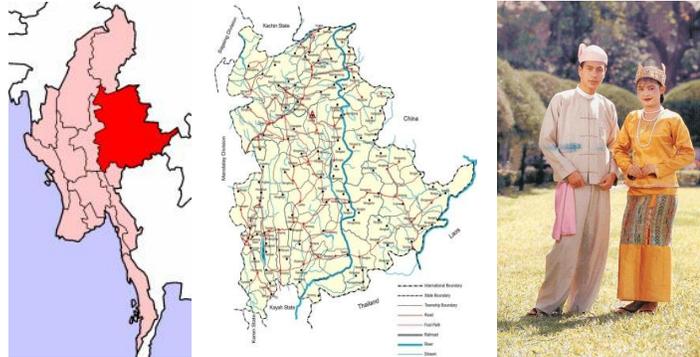


- Timeline** 17th September 2014
- Delegation**
 - ✓ (12) male and (4) female from Kaw Ka Reike Township
 - ✓ (9) male and (6) female from Kya Inn Seik Kyi Township
 - ✓ (12) male and (3) female from Pa An Township
 - ✓ (1) male and (1) female

Total: 48 delegates

- Attendees** 120 people

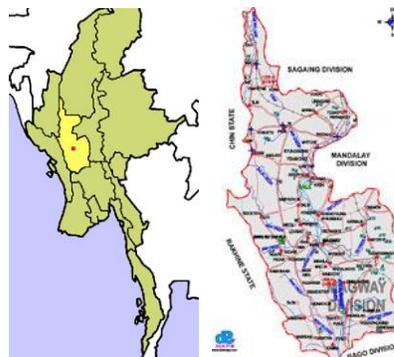
► SHAN STATE



- **Timeline** 30th September 2014
- **Delegation**
 - ✓ (13) male and (2) female from Kyauk Meh Township
 - ✓ (12) male and (8) female from Naung Cho Township
 - ✓ (5) male and (-) female from La Shio Township

Total: 40 delegates
- **Attendees** 174 people

► MA GWAY DIVISION



- **Timeline** 2nd October 2014
- **Delegation**
 - ✓ (11) male and (4) female from Min Done township
 - ✓ (8) male and (-) female Kan Ma Township
 - ✓ (2) male and (3) female from Tha Yet Township
 - ✓ (7) male and (3) female from Aung Lan Township
 - ✓ (10) male and (-) female from Mying Township
 - ✓ (2) male and (-) female from Pakhukku Township
 - ✓ (1) male and (-) female Sin Baung Weh Township

Total: 51 delegates
- **Attendees** 140 people

Meeting Brief

The year 2014 ushered in unprecedented political activity for our organization. The AFFM attended several meetings that targeted the following topics:

- migrant issue;
- child labour;
- labour force surveys;
- minimum wage;
- industrial relation

The AFFM is enthusiastic about expressing views in an open, accessible forum and believes the meetings provide an excellent platform for sharing, discussing, and exchanging ideas. It is imperative this activity continues, in order to ensure the preservation of ideas and recommendations of the organization.

National Tripartite Dialogue

This dialogue exhibits the first concrete step toward promoting social justice and effective action. The AFFM and Myanmar Trade Union Federation (MTUF) jointly participated in worker groups for driving the implementation of union and group plans.

► Key Issues

✓ Issues Affecting Farmers and Agricultural Workers of Myanmar:

- Intensified landlessness
- Land grabbing
- Human rights violations
- Food insecurity
- Environmental destruction/climate crisis due to the imperialists corporate agenda
- Oppression, displacement, discrimination

✓ Empowerment

- Farmers and agricultural workers continue to educate, organize, and mobilise
- Strengthen the agricultural workers' movement for land accessibility, living wages, security of employment and safe working conditions.
- Strengthen the people's movement on climate change and the people's self-determination in food sovereignty and agriculture
- Integrate the agricultural worker's struggle for genuine agrarian reform and food sovereignty in the over-all struggle for freedom and democracy

- ✓ **National Priority Issues**
 - Labour law reform
 - Ratification for international labour standards
 - Building the National Commission for Economic and Social Affairs
 - National minimum wages and fair income
 - Social protection
 - Migrant worker
 - Corporate social protection
 - Land issue
 - Contract farming

- ✓ **Core Strategies**
 - Movement Building
 - Realising genuine agrarian reform and food sovereignty
 - Resisting aggression, including all forms of land grabbing
 - Strengthening the people's movement through the realisation of access and ownership of land and ecological agriculture
 - Strengthening and developing ecological agriculture and the regeneration of ecosystems
 - Bolstering Movement
 - Strengthen people's movement and resistance through realisation of workers' rights
 - People to people exchanges
 - Alliance building and consolidation of struggle through partnership with other movements and organizations

- ✓ **Awareness/ Training**
 - The AFFM has organized awareness training on core labour standards. The total FoA awareness-raising trainings were provided by the ILO FoA program of ILO Liaison office for 10 training sessions for the year 2014.
 - AFFM youth leadership training was provided by IUF AP and it was an absolutely essential for future of AFFM.
 - The chances and pitfalls of contract farming awareness training were provided by IUF AP in instalments: 4 times in Kachin State, 2 times in Greater Bago division and 1 time in Greater Aye Yarwady division.
 - For the future of the AFFM, youth leadership training was held in August 2014 and was provided by IUF AP.

✓ **Women**

- The AFFM commends the achievement of the women workers of Myanmar. The International Women Day (IWD) for year 2014 was held on 8th March 2014. 120 female representatives from 12 regions were in attendance. The event was an excellent platform for raising awareness about female leadership.

✓ **Youth**

- Youth development and young leadership advancement are absolutely essentials. Most of the AFFM trainings are targeted towards young leaders, as to create critical and thoughtful participants. Emotional leadership, and recognition of new challenges of global politics and economics are also valuable traits of the AFFM's youth members.

✓ **Solidarity Action**

- The AFFM is determined to stand as a strong workers network. On 28 November 2014, the **5 federations** - AFFM, Myanmar Trade Union Federation (MTUF), Myanmar Maritimes Workers Federation (MMWF), Myanmar Teachers Federation and Myanmar Migrant Workers Network successfully signed a solidarity agreement (MoU - *viewable on following page*) to work and operate for future advancement Myanmar and its people.

Cooperation in Solidarity Agreement

With the common objectives to realize social justice, opportunities that guarantee decent works for workers all over Myanmar, we, the undersigned leaders of five federations (Agriculture and Farmers Federation of Myanmar, Myanmar Trade Unions Federation, Myanmar Maritime Workers Federation, Migrant Worker Right Networks, and Myanmar Teachers Federation), hereby jointly agree and sign to work for:

- (1) The emergence of a strong force of workers and farmers in the process of democratic transition and economic development of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
- (2) The emergence of good social-economic environment
- (3) The protection of workers' rights and capacity-building through raising awareness and trainings for workers, small farmers, teachers, public officials, seafarers and workers from different sectors
- (4) The efforts for the strategic organizing of workers from different sectors
- (5) The strong policies for the stability of labour market, decent and stable income for all workers including farmers
- (6) The amendment of Labour Organization Law and Settlement of Labour Disputes' Law
- (7) the ratification of Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), and the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144) by the government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
- (8) The emergence of national center that stands for all workers and farmers to represent in Asia Pacific region and international community.



Handwritten signature and date: 28/11/2014

Handwritten signature and date: 25.11.2014

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