GIRL DETERMINED

Teenage Girls to the Front: Taking the lead and challenging assumptions

ANNUAL REPORT 2019
Girl Determined helps girls to recognize their personal and group potential. In Myanmar, we are sparking a movement of girls who have the leadership skills to advocate for their own rights and a future that does not re-create the challenges and risks they now face.

Girls in Myanmar struggle with restrictive gender roles, poverty, dangerous labor, violence and early marriage. Through our programming, adolescent girls gain critical skills and confidence to assert their needs and develop plans to improve their lives.

Working since 2010, Girl Determined has been the only organization in the country to work exclusively with adolescent girls, which we do through our foundational “Colorful Girls” program. Colorful Girls has reached over 10,000 girls ages 12 to 17 in rural and urban communities across the country. The foundation of our work is our weekly programs, which follow a structured, activity-based curriculum over two consecutive years. Girls improve their communication skills, learn to set goals and plan for their future, practice leadership skills, learn about their bodies, and develop a strong appreciation of diversity, difference, and tolerance. Building on those weekly sessions, girls also have the opportunity to participate in summer camp, media development, and advocacy forums. Girls from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds work together to build a world where girls are safe, confident and have the power to decide their futures.

Girl Determined is a US-registered 501(c)3, based in Myanmar.
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A SPACE FOR GIRLS’ THOUGHTS AND CREATIVITY

WUT MON MAGAZINE
Wut Mon is a by-girls, for-girls print publication where girls share art, poems, health information, political news, and inspiration. It is the only publication of its kind in Myanmar and allows girls to talk to and learn from their peers across regions, ethnicities, and religions. Young women alumnae and girls currently in our weekly Circles and Sports programs make up the magazine committee. Committee members gather input from other adolescent girls, project updates and all kinds of submissions, and set the themes. Small groups of Colorful Girls across the country handcraft each issue.

Wut Mon serves to portray girls in positive and complex ways, not as background characters or victims. The magazine also connects girls with each other to assert their needs and find solutions to common concerns. Here, girls have a space to learn new things, and for those involved in its creation, to build practical skills, whether writing and story development, project management, or graphic design.

We first launched Wut Mon in mid-2016, with the help of an experienced graphic designer. We learned a lot, and based on feedback after the first issue, we did not print the second issue until over a year later. In that time, we developed new processes which put content development, layout and design, planning and distribution into the hands of program girls and alumnae. In 2019, we printed 8,000 copies of Wut Mon, which reached girls across rural communities and urban outskirts.
Every issue of Wut Mon features a pollinator, an outstanding young woman the magazine committee chooses and tells her story. There is no other similar space in Myanmar for adolescent girls to read about peers who are working hard for the benefit of others, taking leadership roles and fostering change. Pollinators come from the same backgrounds as readers—no urban elites, no conventional champions—and provide realistic sources of inspiration for them.

S u h l a i n g H t e t  
A Pollinator

One issue this year featured an interview with Su Hlaing Htet. At age 16, she’s in her final year of high school. Su Hlaing Htet comes from a poor family from Sagaing Region, and her parents sent her to a Buddhist nunnery for school. She knows firsthand the difficulties countless girls face. Most of the other girls at the nunnery were ethnic minorities, which gave Su Hlaing Htet—an ethnic Burman—the opportunity to think about people from other backgrounds.

A big recent event in her life was her trip to the Hluttaw (National Parliament), where she presented to parliamentarians on barriers girls face in their education, which limit their ability to achieve.

She says she wants to see girls and women more engaged in politics and activism. She spoke of some of the conservative, out-moded thinking which people commonly hold about women: “They say, girls don’t need to read. When they get older, they only need to be good mothers. If they add more inclusive ideas into the education system, it won’t be too late for this current generation of girls.”

When asked about what she learned in the two-year Colorful Girls Circles, she brought up a weekly lesson topic, “Communicating with Authority Figures.” She was able to put those lessons into practice in her own life living at a dormitory, where she dealt with the dorm mother and teachers. “I learned how to interact with people better, too,” she says.

She finished with a few words to the reader: “If by walking slowly, consistently step by step, to the place of our destination, even the sky can be reached.”
Most girls experience a lot of violence. It’s not just girls who experience it, but also most boys too. Harassment is one kind of violence. In our village, a lot of people face violence, even though the community doesn’t see it as violence. For example, some man may pinch a girl’s cheek when she’s young as a way to show affection. If she doesn’t like it, her mother might say to her, “he’s just being affectionate.” Later on, when she’s older, he might take advantage of that girl and even rape her. Then people will blame her, and what will he say? Probably, “You let me do that in the first place?” No matter who it is—a relative, someone close to you, or a stranger—if someone teases you like that, supposedly out of affection and you don’t like it, speak up and tell that person clearly.

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Boys always come out on top.

Girls are always undervalued.

Girls always have to be at the bottom.

No matter what the situation, people favor boys over girls, even when they don’t have any qualifications.
BUILD A SAFE WORLD
WHERE YOU CAN OPEN YOUR HEARTS TO EACH OTHER WITHOUT SWALLOWING BACK YOUR THOUGHTS \& FEELINGS.

Chit Yu Khaing
Mandalay Region
Just because I'm a girl,
it doesn’t mean I can only do housework,
it doesn’t mean I can only sell in the market,
I’m not sad nor do I feel down
because I’m a woman.
I am a woman.
Just because I’m a girl,
it doesn’t mean I’m greedy for gold and money.
I don’t hate anyone, I don’t hate boys.
I’m full of love.
I’m not uneducated because I’m only a woman.
I’m not prejudiced.
I don’t like that people say girls
are meant to do only housework.
I’m a person trying to succeed
even though I’m just a girl.
NO GOOD GIRL LEADERS WILL APPEAR IN THE WORLD IF GIRLS JUST RUN AWAY FROM FEAR EVERY TIME THEY SEE OR HEAR OR RUN INTO SOMETHING BAD.

LWAY ZU ZU WIN
MANDALAY REGION
In all the sports I’ve ever played, volleyball is the most fun. Shouting and frolicking girls, brave girls, join together every week. Excited and fresh, they play.

No matter rich or poor
We’re all the same in the circle.
Whatever we don’t know,
We’re happy to learn.
We’re lucky to have joined.
Let’s learn!

Nam Kham Aung
Shan State
ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2019
2019 BY THE NUMBERS

- **4,800 GIRLS** enrolled in Colorful Girls Programming
- 400 girls in Girls Stand Up Pilot Project
- 371,120 hours of structured programs
- 40 alumnae advance to project leadership
- 8,000 copies of Wut Mon Magazine distributed to girls and alumnae
- 3,360 girls playing sports
- 80 communities reached
- 250 girls go to leadership camp

Achievements in 2019
This year saw an expansion and reach of our programming: **4,800 Colorful Girls in eighty communities**, including ten new communities, especially in Tanintharyi Region. Girls had **371,120 hours of direct structured programs**, almost **80,000 hours more than in 2018**. Even with the increase in number of girls, each girl participated in more program hours.

In 2018, we developed a new impact assessment led by the Girls’ Peer Research Unit. In 2019, we got the initial data from their assessments on one year of our two-year Circles program. In 2020, we will gather more data from girls once they have completed the program. In this initial data we found that half of girls had shifted to a more positive perception of girls being leaders, including accepting the idea that a good leader is someone who listens and promotes teamwork. Three out of five girls reported a reduced tolerance for domestic abuse. And, a significant number of girls showed a better understanding of puberty and have begun to question common menstrual taboos, some of which are dangerous.

Girl Determined held three summer camps, with around **250 girls**. Two camps focused on peacebuilding and diversity inclusion, and one on leadership and media. Camp participants—all were girls from regular Colorful Girls programs—had to apply and be selected to come to camp. Criteria for selection included commitment to gender equity, social inclusion, and willingness to take action on these issues in their own communities. This year there was a special focus on the four barriers which girls had identified at the National Conference in 2018. This focus ties in with the girl-led advocacy to the Hluttaw (Parliament) described below.

In the course of International Day of the Girl gatherings, **3,200 girls** identified issues in their communities which disproportionately affect girls and created action plans to address them. One example comes from girls living in camps for the internally displaced, who do not feel safe to use camp toilets at night, with implications for their health and psychological well-being. In these camps, girls created a plan with a timeline to raise the problem with their families and camp authorities in order to improve lighting and post an on-site security person.

Girl Determined launched Girls Stand Up, a play-based, self-protection program. This program is designed for girls ages ten and up. **Four hundred girls across four regions** enrolled in and completed the pilot. They learned how to identify risks and safe places in their surroundings and how to respond should they encounter violence themselves or see others facing it.
In 2019, we released two more issues of Wut Mon, our Pollinator magazine and special focus of this report, which saw a large increase in distribution to **8,000 copies**. From conversations with our readers, we know that many share their copies with other women and girls in their communities, extending its reach.

**Forty alumnae girls** advanced into project leadership in 2019 as Circle facilitators, volleyball coaches, peer researchers, and magazine committee members. These forty alumnae represent roughly a quarter of the women leading community-based program activities. Such internal advancement reflects their interest in staying involved in Colorful Girls and their motivation to improve themselves. They also bring the benefit of their own previous experience in our programs to their work, making weekly sessions with younger girls more relevant.

As of 2019, **3,360 girls are now involved in sports**, almost 70% of all girls. Our goal is to have all girls in our programs become involved in sports, but we still face space constraints and ingrained norms. Such a large number of girls means that we have been able to get permission to perform simple upgrades to several community play areas, including pulling up rocks, smoothing surfaces, and putting in basic volleyball net standards. These developments make the girls more eager to participate and boosts their confidence. This year we hosted our first fellow from Women’s Sports Corps, a US-based program, who brought technical volleyball skills to train coaches.
Achievements in 2019

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SPECIAL ACTIVITIES AND RECOGNITIONS

Meeting with Members of National Parliament
In February, a delegation of seven girl representatives delivered a letter outlining four barriers to their progress and proposed solutions to eleven members of Parliament in the capital, Naypyidaw. Over the course of the ensuing three-hour meeting with the parliamentarians, who had been especially called, the girls elaborated on these barriers and told stories of their experiences.

In 2018, girls from across the country had identified those barriers through the National Agenda for Girls, which Girl Determined had instigated. These were:

- Limited access to education and a supportive educational environment
- Feeling unsafe and not knowing how to respond to dangerous situations
- Feeling unable to make decisions and express opinions about their own lives
- Inadequate access to health and hygiene needs

The members of Parliament listened to the girls and encouraged them to have on-going communication, and one even encouraged them to speak in front of the entire Parliament. This presentation of their letter was monumental, since such a meeting goes against established norms of gender and age, which places girls low in the hierarchy.

Girls Learn to Build a Park
In 2019, Girl Determined partnered with Doh Eain, an urban place-making organization, to create a girl-designed safe public space in peri-urban Yangon. Public spaces in Myanmar are often not safe for girls and do not serve their interests, for example by catering to the preferences of boys and men to play soccer. By having girls take the lead, the design centered their interests and needs. Fifteen girls from Colorful Girls programs participated in a full design-and-build program, which included learning how to refine their ideas, draft budgets, and prepare scale drawings. Through hands-on work like painting and bricklaying, the girls turned a small patch of wasteland in Hlaing Thaya into Pyoe Yaung Chi Park, a place where girls—and everyone—can exercise, relax, and hang out with their friends.

Volleyball Coach Wins Made-to-Play Fund Award
Ting Myaw, one of our coaches from Kachin State, was a winner of the Made-to-Play Fund Award sponsored by Women Win, Nike Foundation, and Gurls Talk. Ting Myaw was honored for her commitment to getting young women from conflict-affected areas involved in sports. Out of 200 applicants from around the world, the Fund chose her to come to Europe to learn about young women’s leadership, and funded her project to lead a volleyball skills development program for 100 girls aged ten-to-fourteen who have been displaced by war.

Modelling a New Girl-Centered Approach to Research
Girl Determined had the opportunity to join the panel “Girls as Decision Makers” at the Nairobi Summit (ICPD +25) in Kenya. With representatives from three other girl-centered organizations from the Philippines, Nigeria, and Serbia, Girl Determined formed a panel to address the question of how to involve young women and girls authentically in organizational and programmatic leadership. Brooke Zobrist presented on the Girls’ Peer Research Unit as a transformative approach to organizational impact assessment and research which positions girls not just as project targets, but as having a central role in the research itself. Rather than hiring outside experts to perform impact assessments, the Unit is made up of girls and young women who collect data from other girls, making them actual knowledge producers.
“How could they tell us of a resource, only to then say that we could not make use of it?”

Nang Raw, 16
Kachin State
One girl's experience advocating at Myanmar's National Parliament

In March 2019, Nang Raw travelled from the northern-most part of Myanmar to Naypyidaw, where she spoke with members of Parliament. She recounted to them her experiences growing up in war-torn Kachin State, where over 100,000 people live in temporary camps for the internally displaced. Other girls from her region selected her to represent them and speak on their behalf. She and six other girl delegates decided what points each would talk about and prepared their speeches together. She delivered hers to a dozen members of Parliament in her native Jinghpaw language.

Afterwards, Nang Raw had this to say about the experience: “Some members of Parliament told us that through the Community Development Fund, villages can secure funds for various development projects, including ones which could address the barriers girls face. They suggested we contact our local administrators, but then told us that the funds are not available to be used in conflict-affected areas.”

Some of the members of Parliament Nang Raw and the other girls addressed seemed to listen to them carefully. One woman member commended the girls for their strength, saying she could never imagine herself speaking up like them when she was their age. Others seemed more interested in talking about their own work and were unable to accept the girls’ struggles as real. Nang Raw and the others were confused and not sure whether the members of Parliament had really understood their situation or had realistic solutions. How could they tell them of a resource, only to then say that they could not make use of it?

Despite their frustrations, Nang Raw saw the value of the entire process of preparing, travelling, and meeting with real members of Parliament, and then speaking with local press afterwards. She and the others have taken their experiences back to their communities and continue to advance the interests of girls.
“These days there is little space for girls in Yangon. Now we are working to create a space for us. Other spaces do not accommodate us, but our space will accommodate everyone.”

Khin Su Lay, 13
Yangon Region
“Attending the FIFA Women’s World Cup Match during the Girls’ Summit in Paris fulfilled a life-long dream of mine. That was huge for me and something I will never forget.”

Ting Myaw
Kachin State
Modelling a New Girl-Centered Approach to Research

Gender transformational approaches are not project activities. Instead, they challenge restrictive gender norms, promote equitable positions of women and girls in society, and move toward equitable distribution and access to resources, the most difficult of all.

Brooke Zobrist
Girl Determined
Executive Director
OUR DETERMINED PHILOSOPHY

Never lose sight of the girl: Keep her at the center
Girls are firmly at the center of our programming, in the sense that we first foster change at the individual level. When their understanding of who they are as people and members of society comes more clearly into focus, they can start to come together as a group to identify the factors in their lives—whether in society, in their community, in their religions or families—which are holding them back, limiting them, or disempowering them. Or, as they say in Burmese, “making them feel small.” At this point, the girls can see the similarity in factors across themselves as a group and can decide and work together to take action against these factors not only for themselves here and now, but for future generations of girls.

Our philosophy is never lose sight of the girl: Keep her at the center. We do not address directly the outside factors. Let the girls work out for themselves how best to address those factors from their position with a set of skills and perceptions which they can use in any situation, and no one can take away from them.
CHALLENGES AND MOVING FORWARD
The basic challenges which girls face across Myanmar society are the same challenges which continue to drive us as an organization: society undervalues girls and underserves their interests, and does not recognize them as a segment of society with potentials of their own and contributions to make.

In all of our work, we do not want to recreate the same social, ethnic, linguistic, and geographical hierarchies of wider society, which work to disempower girls – and a lot of others as well. We celebrate the successes of more and more girls, but are still very much aware of the deep, structural difficulties most girls continue to face.

As Girl Determined learns more from the girls and builds stronger organizational systems, we have become better able to adapt our approaches to meet girls where they are. The hardest-to-reach girls, which includes girls with disabilities, child domestic workers and migrant girls, need flexible and varied programming. One such adaptation is the Girls Stand Up program which we piloted in 2019 and features a three-month, play-based curriculum in two versions: one for girls aged ten-to-fourteen and one for girls aged fifteen-to-eighteen. This shorter three-month program duration provides an opportunity for girls who would otherwise be unable to join our full two-year Circles program. For example, a child domestic worker may not be able to participate in our full...
program, but can get permission to participate in Girls Stand Up. Girls who have participated in any of these adaptive programs will have full access to our crisis support services. Going forward, we plan to expand such programs while continuing to look for new ways to adapt to girls’ needs and interests.

Girl Determined will continue to build creative partnerships and coalitions which promote the interests of adolescent girls as a segment of society. In 2019, the partnership with Doh Eain described above, gave girls the opportunity to design and build a pocket park. Girls learned design and drafting concepts and basic construction—not the usual kinds of skills girls their age are taught. Through the park project, the girls showed their communities what they were capable of. The success of this project affirms to us the value of seeking out unusual partnerships and justifies the complexity of working together in this way.

We are formalizing the Young Women’s Pathway to Lead, through which young women program alumnae will have the opportunity to move into leadership roles working directly with younger girls in their communities. The Young Women’s Pathway gives real power and responsibility to these women, who will receive on-going personal and professional development support, while being also accountable to the girls and their communities. Girl Determined is preparing to lay down these pathways in a structured and intentional way in 2020.

Though a few extraordinary girls were able to meet with members of Parliament and lead community projects, these examples need not be the only way girls can be leaders or work with and in their communities successfully. Moving forward, we want to create a variety of pathways to leadership, success, and community engagement, not just for the few or select. We have, for example, been considering encouraging girl-led campaigns, for example related to educated, safety, or whatever else girls in a community decide is of importance to them; offering micro-grants to girls to lead their own projects, from picking up trash to creating a revolving investment fund; and creating a girls’ advisory board for our organization.

As the status of some girls improved in 2019, we want to consolidate these gains so that more girls are in a position to help themselves and make changes for the future. We will continue exploring ways to advance girls into decision-making positions in their families and communities.
**BOARD AND DONORS**

Girl Determined benefits from the oversight of a Board of Directors with relevant technical and sector experience, and is further supported by a Myanmar-based advisory board in the development of Colorful Girls programs.

**Kirsten Gelsdorf**  
Practitioner and teacher in the field of Complex Humanitarian Emergencies; Professor of Practice of Public Policy and Director of Global Humanitarian Policy at University of Virginia Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy.

**Cristy West**  
Mixed media artist, philanthropist and founder of the Brimstone Award for Applied Storytelling at the National Storytelling Network.

**Andrea Menefee**  
Expert in Nutrition and Food Security in Myanmar and Southeast Asia, and currently nutrition advisor to the Global Health Department of Save the Children US.

**Andrea Woodhouse**  
World Bank Senior Social Development Specialist, with particular expertise in Myanmar and Fragile Political Environments and Countries in Transition.

**Dr. Mary Callahan**  
Associate Professor of International Studies at the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington; political scientist with expertise in political reform and the military in Myanmar, and founding partner of Ava Advisory Group in Yangon.

**Brooke Zobrist**  
Executive Director of Girl Determined and long-term expert and consultant in women and girls’ rights, education, and civil society development in Myanmar and Southeast Asia.
Corporate, foundation, government and other institutional supporters

C & A Foundation
ChildFund Myanmar
Foundation for a Just Society
Global Giving
Millby Foundation
Network for Good
NoVo Foundation
SOL Foundation
Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom
Women Win International

“Thank you for openly and honestly sharing your organisational and situational challenges. It gives much more context to the difficulties you face working in Myanmar.

Michelle Yue
The Millby Foundation, Chair and Trustee

“Glad to see girls holding their own and advancing.

Shalini Nataraj
Ing Foundation, Vice President, Programs
Individual and Family Partnerships

Patricia Andersson
Wendy Arbeit
John and Anita Beard
Corinne Blakemore
Vicky Bowman
Leah Childress
Stephen Durbin
Michelle Eades through Pledgeling Foundation
Karen Faunt
Mechthild Schmidt Feist
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Joan Rost
Helmut Schuler
Still Waters Fund of The New York Community Trust
  in memory of Ruth Dickler
Richard Succa
Union Bar & Grill
Mary Weinland
Marissa C. Wesely Fund through Fidelity Charitable
The Brimstone Fund of Cristy West
Judith White
Zobrist Family through Schwab Charitable
Brooke Zobrist

““
You have started something amazing that will continue for generations.
Karen Faunt

““
Very pleased to offer this small support and will try to do more next year. I think the work you do is excellent.
Christopher Hughes
Ways to continue to support:

Thank you for your generosity and we look forward to your ongoing support and encouragement. Your investments work to build strong, confident girls with character, that are working to change our world today and into the future.

Stay connected
Log onto our website at girldetermined.org to sign-up for our Girl Determined Newsletter, which brings analysis and stories from girls to you three times per year.

facebook.com/GirlDeterminedMM
twitter.com/GirlDetermined

Keep donating
Visit our website to make a contribution - either a one-time contribution or a recurring, monthly gift. This type of support is critical to advancing our mission of girls’ leadership. It allows us to be certain we can respond quickly and effectively to shifts in the context and unexpected opportunities.

Send us an email at info@girldetermined.org to find out how to send checks, wires or stocks.

Support a girl

Contact us with creative fundraising ideas
We have had incredible couples collect donations instead of wedding gifts, and determined girls in the US launch a bead bracelet campaign. If you are interested in helping to raise funds in your communities, please reach out with your ideas and we can work together.
As per our robust child protection policy, the photos and stories in this report do not include the actual girls’ names or specific locations. This ensures anonymity and safekeeping of the girls with whom we work.

This annual report was produced by Girl Determined in 2020; all content was written by Girl Determined and Patrick McCormick, unless otherwise noted.

Photographic images used throughout the report were obtained with permission and sourced by the following:

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Aleta Phelps (p.17, p.21, p.22, p.23).
Josephine (p.24, p.26)