An introduction from our Chairman

This newsletter focuses on the future. For a charity that is celebrating its 30th anniversary, it is of course important to remember, and we have been doing this as well. But for our friends, for our committed staff in Myanmar and the UK, and for the trustees, what matters is not only what has been done, but how we can continue to deliver real and lasting change through education. This is all the more important because of the difficult and sometimes tragic landscape of Myanmar in 2019, where so much remains to be done. Our commitment to serve all the communities of that country is more important than ever at this time. One way in which Prospect Burma makes change possible across the country is through the innovative and brave choices of our alumni. We are working with renewed energy to support and develop our network of exceptional people across many different walks of life. You will learn more of some of their visions, and the transformations these can effect, in the pages that follow. We are also going to do more to give people access to the kinds of education that can make them into leaders for Myanmar’s future. Our Access to Learning Programme is a vehicle by which we can reach into communities where higher education seems to be an impossible dream. We need and want to do more of this. At the heart of what we offer to Myanmar’s young people are our scholarships, through our Learning to Leadership programme. This year, we are committed to growing the number of candidates we can support at all levels, and to actively seeking new students in disciplines where we feel Myanmar needs new skills. All of the trustees offer their profound thanks to our friends, without whose support we can undertake none of this work. A charity like Prospect Burma shows what becomes possible when people come together, and are not forced apart by rhetoric and violence into frightened, separate cells.

In our fragmented, frightened world - this matters more than ever.

Michael Marret-Crosby
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Burma watch - a time of reflection and hope

When Prospect Burma was founded in 1989, there were two immediate priorities. First, there were the thousands of students who had taken refuge in the borderlands following the military crackdown and closure of the universities. And second, there was the collapse of education in the country more generally during decades of conflict and government mismanagement. The situation was especially acute in the ethnic borderlands of such peoples as the Kachins, Karens and Mons where many students were taking sanctuary. At the time, large populations of refugees and displaced persons were growing around all the country’s borders.

Thirty years later, Burma – now Myanmar – has changed in many respects. Since transition began from military to a new system of quasi-civilian government in 2011, political freedoms are much more open in the country. It is now possible to talk in forward-looking ways about education, health, the environment and many long-neglected issues under military rule. Hopes further accelerated following the victory of the National League for Democracy in the 2015 general election, and the amount of understanding about the country’s socio-political problems has steadily improved. Many PB alumni are active in the country, playing important roles in different areas of national life – an aspiration that PB always had at its 1989 foundation.

And yet, it is by no means a time for complacency. Significant changes have begun but, sadly, two fundamental challenges remain: humanitarian crisis and educational failings. Myanmar is still a land in conflict; fighting continues in the Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States; up to two million people are refugees or displaced from their homes; Myanmar stands at 148th of 189 countries on the UN Human Development Index; and half the population is living below the poverty line. Meaningful starts have been made in different aspects of reform, but there is still a long way to go.

This is especially true in the educational sector. Here, as the Education Minister Dr. Myo Thein Gyi recently said, reform is being held back by decades of inertia and lack of funding. In many areas, teaching standards are low, and there is a grave lack of suitably qualified teachers. Such challenges exist from the primary to university levels. To give just one example, 45,000 new school buildings were required for the present academic year, but funds were available for just 4,700. To compensate for this, many educationalists believe that concentration should be on the quality of teaching rather than numbers and physical infrastructure. But without peace and inclusive delivery, it remains difficult for educationalists to put ideas into practice.

In the meantime, hope is not lost. Progress may be slow but it is happening, and education is at the core of future peace and development. In this respect, PB continues to pave a pioneering way by providing educational opportunity and outreach in neglected subjects and areas around the country. An important model has been developed over the past three decades. Now, it is trusted, will be the time that the country can accelerate.
The future is...expanding

Over 30 years Prospect Burma has provided many hundreds of higher education scholarships. As Myanmar rapidly changes, our scope is expanding and we are excited about a future of new possibilities.

For many years students in Myanmar could not access higher education at home. Today, with universities open again and internet connectivity available throughout the country, it would be easy to believe that our work is accomplished. However with universities in Myanmar still falling far below international standard and the rapidly moving political situation in the country, the need for our work is greater than ever.

The transition between matriculation at Grade 10 and university is a significant leap. In order to study abroad, students from Myanmar need more than just good grades – they need a recognised English language qualification. They also need a raft of other skills. Students today are required to carry out all of their work on computers, and often assignments are logged and assessed online. For people living in remote, rural villages access to computers is incredibly limited. Although Facebook is now widely used throughout the country, skills which we may take for granted such as how to correctly use search engines, keep our personal data secure and compose professional emails may not have been acquired by many of our students. While at university they will be expected to debate and question, which a lifetime of rote learning does not prepare you for. Our Access to Learning programme aims to fill these gaps in our students’ knowledge.

Over the coming years, we plan to expand our Access to Learning and Change in the Community Programmes, to provide preparation for, and aftercare following, study abroad. We are working with partners throughout the country, including Rakhine State, to create more access programmes, offering vital pre-university training to people in some of the most remote parts of the country. We took the first step this year with the launch of our Bridging Programme. Read about one of the first Bridging Programme students below.

When they return home, securing employment can be a daunting prospect for our graduates. Our Change in the Community programme will be expanding in the coming years, to offer community hubs throughout the country where alumni can network, share opportunities and support each other. We are excited to share with you, in future editions, how this is developing.

Bridging Programme - Eh Gay Dah’s story

Eh Gay Dah grew up in a village in Kayin State in the south of Myanmar. He was born in 1989 into a family experiencing the after-effects of the violent quashing of student protests the year before. When his elder brothers became teenagers the family worried that they might be forced to join the army, and they fled across the border to become immigrant workers in Thailand. They had not passed their high school qualifications, and left school without graduating. Eh Gay Dah however wanted to stay in school, and his family all supported him in this choice. As someone of Karen background, he experienced a barrier to education that a lot of ethnic groups in Myanmar encounter:

“When I finished primary school, I needed to move to the middle school that [was] quite far from my village. At that time, all of the teachers used Burmese language in teaching all of the subjects. Every day, I just sit in the classroom and listened to the teachers without understanding what they taught. And also I was so silent in the class because I was not capable to communicate in Burmese. Every day, I just went back home and studied lesson without knowing the meaning.”

This method of rote learning is standard in Myanmar, and Eh Gay Dah successfully completed his middle school education despite not speaking Burmese. People from the community were perplexed by his decision to study, and often asked his parents why they didn’t send him to Thailand along with his brothers, to make money. Eh Gay Dah however was passionate about education at this point, and with the help of a scholarship and his parents support undertook Library and Information Studies at the University of East Yangon. When he graduated Eh Gay Dah started to become interested in the workings of his community, and in particular in the work of community leaders.

Eh Gay Dah applied to Prospect Burma’s Bridging Programme to help better equip himself to be a future community leader. He wanted an IELTS qualification in order to undertake a masters in Rural Development overseas, where he will gain important knowledge about infrastructure development, management and stakeholder management. Eh Gay Dah arrived at Prospect Burma’s Yangon office in early February 2019. Living in the capital city was a far cry from his home village. He told us:

“In Yangon, it takes a lot of time [to travel] because of traffic jam. Also, crowded people and traffic jam affect the environment to become noise and pollute, whereas my city town is pleasure of fresh air and silent environment.”

He found the bridging programme a very enriching experience, telling us that alongside English language training, he received training on: “…Stress and improved basic knowledge on Business Management, Civic education, communication, Environmental, Religion and Belief, Financial management, Gender equality and Private sector development.”

He successfully passed his IELTS training, and now plans to apply for the Prospect Burma Learning to Leadership programme, to support him undertaking his planned masters degree abroad.

Pictured: Top left, Eh Gay Day; Above, Bridging Programme Students
In memory of Viscount John Slim
an avid supporter of Prospect Burma for over a quarter of a century.

Colonel John Slim, 2nd Viscount Slim OBE, DL, FRGS sadly passed away in January of this year, aged 91. He was an avid supporter of Prospect Burma and was our founding Patron, a position he held for 27 years.

Viscount Slim was born in 1927 in the Military hospital in Quetta, in what is now Pakistan. He was educated at the Military school in India, and spent summers with his father at the front lines of military action in Myanmar and India. He himself went on to join the British Indian Army 6th Gurkha Rifles towards the end of the Second World War in 1944. He served in the armed forces for many years until his retirement in 1972, leaving at the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and later receiving an honorary promotion to Colonel. He received an OBE in 1973.

His support and commitment to Prospect Burma throughout his time as our Patron went far beyond an honorary role. Throughout the many years he supported us he rarely missed public events and trustee meetings, and his knowledge and deep interest in the country always provided encouragement and direction. As a former army officer who had known Myanmar at the end of the Second World War, he was very aware of the deep sufferings that the country had undergone, and he always had an especial concern about the challenges faced by the many different ethnic groups.

As president of the Burma Star Association from 1971 until his death, he continued to maintain close contacts with the country, and he was always positive in his belief in the importance of education and providing opportunities to young people. He hosted meetings in parliament to promote the work of PB and sought to raise educational awareness on his travels.

Viscount Slim’s self-deprecating humour was always effective in conveying important messages and his cheerfulness and long-standing support as patron provided PB with a constructive sense of continuity through over a quarter century of educational activities in the field.

We are incredibly grateful to him for his work over so many years. He will be sorely missed.
Climate change is an issue we can no longer afford to ignore, and countries such as Myanmar are the first to feel the devastating effects. We look at how Prospect Burma is working to create a sustainable future for all.

In 2008 Myanmar was hit by the biggest natural disaster in its history, Cyclone Nargis. The scale of the disaster inflicted by the storm was such that Myanmar has been ranked one of the highest “at risk countries” in the Global Climate Risk Index. As a result of the devastation caused by Nargis, over 130,000 people were reported dead, and the future threat of repeated and worse weather events places the country in an uncertain position. The aftermath of the disaster was poorly managed, with the attention of the government on a referendum planned for later that week, and no disaster relief strategy in place. Aid workers struggled to gain access to the country.

Deforestation and removal of important natural barriers also played a part in increasing the scope of the disaster. Removal of coastal mangrove swamps, for firewood and to make way for shrimp fisheries, took away an important barrier resulting in a worsened storm surge which swept through coastal villages, annihilating homes and livelihoods.

Today, over ten years later, the world is becoming more aware of the scale of climate change, and the urgency to make significant changes in order to prevent future disasters and irretrievable loss of habitats.

In Ayeyarwady Region of Myanmar, the restoration of felled mangrove swamps has been underway since 2012, led by villagers in collaboration with Norwegian NGO Worldview International Foundation (WIF). Since this time they have achieved an enormous amount, reporting at the end of 2018 that they had planted 6 million trees. Not only do Mangroves protect the coastline, but they are also incredibly efficient at processing carbon. New studies conducted in 2018 found that they can sequester around four times as much carbon as rainforests, with the carbon being stored in the soil beneath the mangrove trees.

Kyaw Myo Lwin (pictured) is undertaking a Master’s of Forestry at Hanoi University, and works as a field assistant on the Mangrove restoration project in Ayeyarwady Region. In this position he assisted the team in establishing the mangrove nursery and plantation, and makes sure they select the best specimens for the salinity, topography and tide inundation of the plantation site.

Kyaw Myo Lwin is truly passionate about Mangroves, and his Master’s degree will equip him with more skills to help in their restoration. He told me how he first came to be interested in Mangroves, during his undergraduate degree:

“When we students travelled to Chaung Thar and Shwe Thaung Yan beaches to study mangrove forests, the project manager from WIF gave us a presentation first, and then we had a chance to study mangrove forests in the field. The project manager named U Win Maung was not only one of the mangrove experts in Myanmar but also a forester, and his whole life was dedicated to Mangrove forests. While he was presenting, I was very surprised and I felt how magic they were.”

When asked about the impact of climate change in Myanmar Kyaw Myo Lwin told us: “Currently Myanmar people have to face flooding and landslide due to climate change... [but] climate change is at global level. Every person around the world is responsible for climate change and it is time to take action urgently.”

The restoration of mangroves is just a small part of the enormous fight to combat climate change. Over the past few years Prospect Burma has supported more people who are interested in subjects vital for the future protection of our planet, including Environmental Engineering, Aquaculture and Ecology. Our graduates have gone on to take up key positions to protect their country, becoming pioneers in areas such as holistic ecological and ethnic preservation (Hsar Doe Doh Moo, the Salween Peace Park), protecting endangered wildlife (Khyne Oo Mar, an influential conservationist) and engaging youth in ecological projects (Bo Bo Lwin, director of a youth empowerment programme).

Long term supporters of Prospect Burma will remember the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis, over 10 years ago, the aftermath of which is still felt by the country today. With climate change expected to lead to more extreme weather events of this kind, the poorest members of our global society are the first to be affected. On Myanmar’s affected coast, villagers have banded together to create an ecological solution.

For now, Kyaw Mo Lwin looks forward to getting back in the field, telling us: “I love mangroves and their magic functions, therefore I love working any place wherever mangroves survive.”

Read more about Kyaw Myo Lwin on www.prospectburma.org/prospect-blog
The future is...here!

For 30 years Prospect Burma has operated on the belief that the best way to create a better future for Myanmar is through investing in education. The ripple effect from one educated person can spread out across their community, and beyond to a national and even global scale. The proof of this is being borne out throughout Myanmar and that future that we have anticipated is here. In this article, Joanna Barnard takes a look at some of the autonomous schools which have been set up to address deficiencies in the formal education system by encouraging critical thinking and imparting vocational expertise.

Independent schools sprung up in refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar border in the early 1990s. Self-funded and separate to the government funded education institutions, by the end of the decade they were attracting financial support from various INGOs.

Today, there are an estimated 50 of these schools across Myanmar, collectively referred to as the “post-secondary” education sector. A further 25 schools exist over the border in Thailand. These schools are not officially recognised, or funded, by the Myanmar government, and use educational materials provided by NGOs and Thai universities. They tend to accept high-school graduates, aged around 16 years, teach full-time courses several months in length, and are not-for-profit. Subjects vary from civic education, social science, leadership and management, to English language. Students can also acquire technical skills including IT, community development, and project management.

Considering that these schools have developed from the “ground-up”, their consistency and comprehensive teaching has been widely praised, filling some of the gaps left by national education.

Prospect Burma alumni are playing a prominent role in the development of these alternative education options, particularly for ethnic minorities in Kayin State.

Growing up in a village close to the Thai border, Saw Khine Thet Tun attended Hpa-An University, offering tuition to younger students to help support himself through his studies. His goals - to educate and eventually open a school - became one step closer to reality when he received a scholarship from PB to study a masters in Educational Administration at Thailand’s Ramkhamhaeng University.

He credits this time with helping him improve his expertise: “Collaboration and cooperating in a team is the effective way to develop higher-order thinking skills... to solve complex real-life problems.”

Moving to Yangon to work at the Kant Kaw Education Centre, in 2012 he co-founded the umbrella movement the Myanmar Community Academies Network (MCAP), which now supports four schools nationwide. One of these, the Education Gathering Group (EGG) Academy in Hpa-An, was established in 2013 by Saw Khine Thet Tun himself. The academy has grown from a small community initiative into a facility that offers instruction in critical thinking, English language and computing skills, for around 80 students from Karen State and beyond. Students are able to graduate with a diploma in Community Development and Leadership, and can take part in activities, clubs and internships.

PB alumnus Thein Phod Awar has also been involved in the academy from its earliest days. Born into a Kayin farming family in a remote village, he studied at the local primary school and then at high school, walking across paddy fields and crossing a river just to attend classes. He was able to complete his schooling with the help of his five siblings, who worked while he studied. From a young age, he knew that he wanted to educate: “I believe that a teacher, if well trained, can build potential human resources for a country. I myself want to be a qualified teacher who is able to nurture potential leaders.”

Thein Phod Awar graduated from Hpa-An University, but was unsatisfied with the quality of the education, feeling that many attended state institutions for the sake of obtaining a certificate, rather than to learn valuable skills. “This mentality needs to be changed,” he remarks.

He learned about EGG, and when it launched its first 18-month...
Youth Leadership Programme, he joined.

“During the programme, I was exposed to qualified teachers and their student-centred teaching method that encourages independent learning, creative and critical thinking. I became more confident and hopeful.”

He later joined the school as a teacher, putting these skills into practice. At this time, Prospect Burma provided him with funds to study for a masters in Educational Administration at Assumption University, Thailand. The scholarship gave him international experience, taking him closer to his goal of inspiring other young people in Kayin State.

He successfully submitted his final thesis in March 2019, returning to Hpa-An to take up a leadership post at EGG.

He reflects upon his experience: “to me, teaching is a very exciting and enlightening experience. To become a knowledgeable and competent teacher but also someone who can change the system.”

These personal stories show how Prospect Burma has empowered its alumni to maximise educational opportunities in their community. Investing in young people through the provision of scholarships has had wide-reaching outcomes, not only helping alumni to achieve their personal and professional goals but expanding out to help educate many more through this national network of post-secondaries. This multiplier effect is a key part of our work, over the past thirty years and expanding into the future.

The schools provide a vital alternative to the restrictive MOE curriculum, allowing young people to acquire a high-quality education, while opening up a space for an appreciation of local concerns and needs, at a time when the question of ‘ethnicity’ is often politically charged.

While the challenges remain numerous, these schools – and Prospect Burma’s contribution – will continue to offer a brighter future for young people lucky enough to have access.

Joanna Barnard, Prospect Burma volunteer

To celebrate our 30 years, we are sharing 30 of the stories that make up our legacy. Read some of the remarkable work our alumni and supporters are doing on www.prospectburma.org/30-change-makers/
Shop for Myanmar this Christmas

Stock up early on stocking fillers and Christmas cards with the Prospect Burma shop! We have brand new designs for greetings cards, which are left blank for your message, and would make a lovely note all year round. We also have an online auction of beautiful Burmese materials which will be taking place throughout October. For details of the auction visit www.prospectburma.org/shop, where you can also order greetings cards. Alternatively, complete and return the order form below to us.

Order form

To order simply complete and return the below form along with a cheque for the total amount, to: Prospect Burma, Victoria Charity Centre, 11 Belgrave Road, London, SW1V 1RB. In order to receive your items before Christmas please make sure you have sent this to us by the middle of November at the latest.

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<tr>
<th>Item name</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Shwedagon Pagoda - Artwork kindly donated by Sally Oyler. Blank for your message.</td>
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<td>£5 for pack of 5</td>
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<td>Prospect Burma greeting cards, blank for your message, with 2 different designs.</td>
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<td>Sally Oyler Christmas card selection pack - With festive greetings, mixed pack of different designs.</td>
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