2020-21 has placed extraordinary burdens on the people of Burma, first by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and then on 1st February by a military assumption of power that has led to terrible and indiscriminate violence upon the country.

Humanitarian and advocacy groups are addressing the immediate emergency, but sadly the situation is set to deteriorate. Unless young people can gain the education and skills to lead their communities through the challenges to come, hope cannot grow. Prospect Burma’s support for this ‘Gen Z’ is now more vital than ever.

Our grantees and alumni are displaying unwavering commitment - as medical practitioners, as community leaders, as innovators in business and civil society, and since 1st February as people who will not give up on freedom. They are facing the military with courage, and a commitment to an inclusive and democratic future for Myanmar.

Prospect Burma was established in a time of crisis. Our first task as a charity was to find ways to help students fleeing from an earlier military coup. Our history and our present commitment have given us the tools by which we are responding to the multiple crises of 2020 and 2021.

In the year under review, we have continued to build opportunities for young women and men to access education. Our focus on under-served communities has enabled students from across the country to engage in our online learning and scholarship programmes. Once again, some remarkable candidates have come forward for our awards. We are proud of them, and all that they will be.

Our patron, our donors and our trustees have together shown great commitment to Prospect Burma. I would like to thank all of them, and especially our dedicated staff in Myanmar and the UK who have worked so hard and under such adverse circumstances. As Chair of Trustees, I could not be more impressed by all that our teams have achieved this year.

Myanmar is facing a new darkness. Education - and boycotting education - have both become acts of revolution and protest. When education loses, so does Myanmar’s future. Prospect Burma has its part to play in keeping hope alive.

In this darkness, each act of bravery to think the new thought, to challenge closed and corrupting ideas, is a point of light. Out of these many points of light, a brighter day will dawn for Myanmar.
Our Programmes

Myanmar is lacking the skilled, educated workforce it needs to repair the country’s damaged infrastructure and institutions, and support the peaceful rebuilding of civil society. Prospect Burma believes that the best way to create positive and lasting change in the country is through investing in education.

We support passionate individuals to study abroad to become the medical specialists, agriculturalists, peace negotiators and every other expert needed to grow sustainable solutions they are best-placed to solve. Many are now working in local, national and international positions, including at the World Bank, WHO and in civil society.

We particularly support those who have had to flee from harm, those in border or refugee settings, the children of political prisoners and others whose education has been made impossible by the military’s assumption of power.

We deliver three programmes which consecutively provide a bridge for under-served people from Myanmar to access higher education, study abroad, and then return home to make a positive difference in their community. They are called Access to Learning, Learning to Leadership, and Change in the Community.

**Access to Learning**
- Critical thinking
- Digital literacy
- English language
- English qualification
- Diversity awareness
- Support & advice

**Learning to Leadership**
- Quality education
- Remote study help
- International ideas
- Professional skills
- Tertiary qualification
- Support & advice

**Change in the Community**
- Support to move into the workplace or next stage of education
- Support to connect, network and pool newfound skills and knowledge
- Alumni promulgate knowledge to grow solution-building and skills capacity

Alumni make a positive difference to their communities and their country
Access to Learning

Our post-high school programme, Access to Learning, provides a bridge to higher education for bright young people from under-served communities, who would otherwise be denied the opportunity.

Through local partners, Access to Learning courses focus on English language skills and qualifications, critical thinking (analysing evidence, questioning, creating solutions) and digital fluency to lift students to a level where they can apply for and succeed at university level.

Importantly, the learning is often conducted through exploration of gender, ethnic and cultural identity which encourages understanding, tolerance and respect.

Even if students do not go on to higher education, they still emerge better equipped to create inclusive and problem-solving workplaces.

“I didn’t go to a state run school so my schooling isn’t recognised by the state. Access to Learning gave me an internationally recognised qualification so I could apply to university. I’m now studying ICT.

I want to return home to support education providers in ethnic areas.”

‘Ko Lin’, Arakenese student

Learning to Leadership

Learning to Leadership is our flagship international scholarship programme. It opens doors to quality higher education abroad, which is not available in Myanmar. We reach out to remote as well as conflict-affected regions, to help prospective students select the right course for their future.

Funders and donors help to cover costs of tuition, travel, visas, learning materials and living expenses. We provide additional support to young people including orientation, peer-to-peer mentoring and pastoral care to help them cope with the emotional and practical challenges of moving to a foreign country. The experience they gain of new cultures, ideas, friends and networks will help them change the status quo in Myanmar.

Studying abroad is an incredibly daunting prospect for many people who may not have left their villages before, let alone boarded a plane to a distant country. Many of the people we support have experienced huge hardship in their lives, from civil war and devastating natural disasters to childhood poverty, and as a result they have a deep and passionate desire to change their country for the better.

‘Naw Cho Thawda’, BA Political Dev., Rangsit University, Bangkok

“My parents were killed by Burmese soldiers when I was two years old. There are many different incidences of human rights abuse taking place, including killing each other, and rape and abuses of young women. I believe there is no justice for young women.

I believe my course will help me to work more effectively with my community, by learning more about human rights, political issues, and development. I aim to use my studies from this university as a weapon to solve the problems in my country.

At university, I am President of the Myanmar Family (Burmese student group). Students are worried about the situation at home. We maintain morale with cooking and singing, and organise donations of clothing and food for Internally Displaced People camps.”
Our Change in the Community programme supports graduates to follow through on their plans to make a positive difference once they leave higher education.

This is where funders’ investment in these young people is returned, again and again as their influence expands over time. We connect alumni so they can pool their newfound expertise to make an even bigger difference. We help them form networks so they can share their skills among their communities. In 2020-21, we supported alumni to form an ‘ARCH’ network in Yangon to come together and design their own programmes to help local communities - see the box below. We were unable to run our annual conference due to COVID-19.

Until 2021, up to 95% of alumni returned to Myanmar. Many work for or have founded their own NGOs to improve the standard of living in under-served areas.

ARCHs

Alumni Regional Cluster Hubs, or ARCHs, are designed to help unify groups of alumni in locations around the country through facilitating discussions, networking and community activities. The first ARCH was launched in early 2020 in Yangon where the planning phase was quickly overtaken by COVID-19, a challenge which the ARCH rose to impressively.

In November 2020, they identified groups particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 in a suburb of East Dagon which is a slum area near a large dumping ground, and where disease is prevalent. They ran a successful local fundraising campaign, raising MMK 5m (£2,270) which they used to source and then distribute healthcare, medical supplies and food.

The project showed the value of bringing together alumni who have gained a range of skills from higher education, including specialist healthcare, communications and logistics experts, who are best placed to identify and meet the needs of their community.

Following the military assumption of power in February 2021, ARCH activities have ceased in the interests of safety. It is unlikely that organised groups of this kind will be possible inside the country for the foreseeable future. We are exploring instead whether a similar model may be feasible for alumni outside of Myanmar.
Prospect Burma partners with community-based organisations (CBOs) to effect grassroots change. Our impact touches society and individuals in a myriad of interconnected ways.

A useful way to marshal our impact is by looking at how themes across our work fit into the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which overlay global development policy. Indirectly, our alumni contribute to all the UN’s 17 SDGs. In this report we’ll look at how Prospect Burma itself directly contributes to Targets within the SDGs in themes related to skills, scholarships, gender equality, ethnic inclusivity and poverty.

**Theme 1 - Building skills capacity**

**Contributes to:**
SDG 4, Target 4.4: increase the number of youth and adults with relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

Prospect Burma addresses a widespread deficit in both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills in Myanmar. Soft skills are abilities including leadership and creative thinking. Hard skills are vocational, technical and professional skills learned to carry out a certain role.

**Soft Skills**

Myanmar’s state education system relies on students simply memorising approved texts. As a result, they emerge without soft skills to enter higher education or the workplace where they will need to react and adapt. Nationwide, few feel they can innovate or suggest change. Meanwhile, poor English language standards act as an additional barrier to accessing higher education abroad.

In 2020–21, Prospect Burma’s post-high school **Access to Learning** programme delivered pre-intermediate English courses to 76 students over two batches. The teaching was underpinned by critical thinking pedagogy, with students having to analyse, lead, negotiate and create solutions.

We also ran English language conversation groups, scholarship information sessions, online discussions and seminars on topics relating to social science and professional skills development for over 1,400 young people from Rakhine State.

All these activities took place through a single Prospect Burma project, the Sittwe Education Resource Centre (SERC) in Rakhine State. They were delivered by a local CBO partner, Scholar Institute, who have fantastic local knowledge and expertise.

Other face-to-face projects were cancelled due to COVID-19. However, in 2021 we are countering this by expanding our online provision through a new project, called Prospect Connect. Working with a local partner, Edulink, this will deliver English language and critical thinking learning to students across Kayin, Kayah, Shan, Kachin, Chin and Rakhine States.

76 English language students 1,400 people reached
Hard skills

Myanmar’s lack of investment in people’s skills development results in the country ranking poorly across several global indices. The consequences of this skills gap affects people’s daily lives including lack of roads, medical facilities, safe housing, local justice systems and more.

We address this skills gap in our Learning to Leadership programme by focussing our scholarship provision on priority subject areas that have a clear relevance to addressing Myanmar’s multiple crises. Our students go on to become the engineers, educators, healthcare workers and many other skilled professionals that the country desperately needs. Our alumni have proven that, years after graduation, their influence continues to expand.

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2015-19: Nunu Aphie helps additional nurses qualify by donating food allowance to pay their fees. They will go on to help thousands more people.

2019: She graduates and helps international doctors translate healthcare training and information into Chin languages and dialects, which helps NGOs and their beneficiaries.

2019-2021: Nunu Aphie and colleagues train 600 community health workers and midwives in remote villages in Chin State, who will in turn help 1000s of villagers and save at least dozens of babies’ lives who will grow up to contribute to society.

2019-2021: She inspires villagers to send their girls to school. At least dozens, possibly 100s, of children will create their own beneficial multiplier effect, potentially benefitting 1000s of people in future years.

2021: Nunu Aphie crosses to India due to attacks on local villages. Having made many local connections in Chin State, she continues to provide online healthcare advice and training to 1000s of Chin people, within and outside Chin State.

How our alumni’s influence expands

‘Nunu Aphie’ (right) demonstrates how educating one person can benefit thousands as her influence ripples outwards through her village and Chin State.

She is just one of more than 1,400 scholars we have supported between 1989 and 2021.

Alumni deliver direct benefits through the skills they’ve gained. They also influence and train others. By 2020-21, we believe they are cumulatively benefitting hundreds of thousands of people.

11 Law/Politics/Social Sciences

7 Environment/Development

5 Business/Management/Economics

5 Healthcare/Medical Specialisms

9 Engineering/Science/Technology

9 Education

6 Media/Arts/Humanities

1990

1995

2000

2005

2010

2015

2020

2021

Chart: Learning to Leadership scholars by subject field in 2020-21.

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Higher education in Myanmar is poor by global standards. A third of its 91 universities are ranked among the lowest 10% in the world, and only one (Yangon University) even makes the top 10,000. This is likely to worsen due to widespread university closures in 2021 and reports of nearly half of staff being suspended by the military.

Our solution is to provide young people in under-served communities with opportunities to access higher education in other countries. These young people can include those who have had to flee from harm, those in border or refugee settings, and the children of political prisoners.

Applicants must demonstrate how they will use their higher education to create solutions and grow positive change after they graduate. The experience they gain of new cultures, ideas, friends and international networks will help them change the status quo in Myanmar.

Studying abroad is a daunting prospect for those who have not left their villages before, let alone boarded a plane. We provide financial, practical and emotional support to help young people survive and thrive at their university.

“Saw Zaw”, Information Technology, Rangsit Uni, Bangkok

“I have had the chance to make new friends from different countries. I feel more mature than before because we can exchange our opinions or ideas on a specific issue to get a better solution or ideas. My English skill is improved by making new friends. Also, now I can speak a little bit of Thai language for shopping, travelling and singing. I have got to see many opportunities that I have not had before. I do public relations for the students’ union. Through this, I have learnt how to lead a team, design thinking, collaboration, confidence and communication skills”
**Theme 3 - Gender equality**

**Contributes to:**
SDG 4, Target 4.3: Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education including university.
SDG 4, Target 4.5: Eliminate gender disparities in education.
SDG 5, Target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls.

Girls are routinely expected to look after families when they grow up - either directly, through carer roles, or unskilled labour to bring in income. With few job prospects, there is little incentive to remain in education and very few women go on to achieve senior positions in the workplace. As a result, half of the population widely lacks a voice, or the opportunity to contribute skills and ideas to help their communities.

Every year, Prospect Burma conducts information sessions for potential scholarship applicants in which we positively encourage women and girls to continue their education, in order to develop the skills they need to improve their communities.

We pair new female scholars with continuing female scholars already at their university, who can mentor them, and help them adjust to living and studying in a different country and culture.

60% (n1,043) of information session attendees were female, as were 63% (n33) of successful applicants.

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"Taekadi"  
BSc Science, Sankardev College, India

"My parents are farmers. They asked me not to go to school. I needed to take responsibility for washing clothes, cleaning the house and feeding the pigs and chickens. I was given old text books with pages ripped out, and wrote with a sharp stone on slate taken from the river.

I studied hard, and then Prospect Burma supported me to study BSc Science in India. They provided all the materials I needed.

I returned to my village to work with the farmers. Farming is very looked down upon. But I helped them understand how they can grow better food while protecting the water and forests. They and I are now very proud of farming, and our village is a healthier place.

They have known me since my childhood. They can’t believe I speak English and graduate, which really makes them believe their girls, like me, can still be educated and helpful."
Ethnic inequality is a major issue in Myanmar. Successive governments have pursued policies of ‘Burmanisation’ which discriminates against ethnicities in all aspects of life. For example, lack of education provision in Chin State resulted in it recording Myanmar’s lowest matriculation exam pass rate in 2018 (17%), which in turn contributed to the State having the country’s highest poverty rate (73%).

Ethnic inclusivity is key to social cohesion across Myanmar society. Prospect Burma addresses this issue by creating educational opportunities for people in under-served communities. In 2020-21, our Access to Learning programme targeted townships in Rakhine State, which has the second highest level of poverty after Chin State.

Meanwhile, our Learning to Leadership international scholarships were marketed online to 23 ethnicities in under-served communities. By awarding support to people from a broad range of ethnicities, we grow a cohort of graduates who can promote understanding, tolerance, and ultimately a peaceful and equitable society.

We monitor where scholars come from, and where they return to, in order to ensure diverse provision. This is because ethnic groups are often focussed in individual States, several of which bear the name of major ethnic groupings. These States are around Myanmar’s more mountainous borderlands rather than its central plains. Remoteness and poor infrastructure create additional educational barriers.

Map: In 2020-21, scholars came from 12 States or Regions, coloured orange

Chart: Breakdown of ethnicity of our 52 scholars in 2020-21

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‘Naw Kay’, Communication Arts, Rangsit Uni, Bangkok

“I grew up in a camp on the Thai/Myanmar border. There were no books in Karen, only English, Burmese or Thai. I realised there is a need for Karen writers and that is why I am studying Communication Arts. Only by studying in their own language can Karen people fully understand text books and learn. They also need books to be written in Karen so they can be literate in the language they speak.”
Theme 5 - Reducing poverty

Contributes to:
SDG 1, Target 1.1: Eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere.
SDG 10, Target 10.1: Achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average.

Education benefits people in many ways including equipping them with skills to improve their healthcare, their environment and the frameworks which sustain their society. However knowledge and skills - or human capital in economic terms - are also tradeable, which puts money in educated, skilled people’s pockets. They reinvest and spend this income among those around them, which helps lift people in low income communities out of poverty.

Before the military assumption of power in February 2021, we surveyed alumni who graduated 1, 3 and 5 years ago. After 5 years, 95% had returned to Myanmar and were spread widely across the country, often in low income areas. Most were working for either local NGOs/CBOs (23%) or International NGOs (23%).

The percentage of alumni in employment levels off at 84% after 5 years, but the percentage with increased earnings continues to rise. This suggests alumni have gained skills and knowledge to progress in their careers and increase earnings and spending in their local community over time. Several alumni have started businesses which employ local people and create wider economic benefits.

We also assess alumni’s spending, to ensure the increased earnings are being put back into the community. Our survey confirmed that, over time, donating to good causes and supporting wider family are the main use of alumni’s increased earnings over time.

Prospect Burma’s alumni have contributed to a halving of the number of people in poverty in Myanmar in the early 20th century. However, that progress is forecast to be reversed by early 2022, with poverty rates doubling again due to COVID-19 and political violence. We will monitor whether and how our alumni are managing to boost economic resilience for themselves and the communities around them as the situation develops.

Financial accountability

Prospect Burma is regulated by UK law. We have up to 8 full time equivalent staff across the UK and Asia, and 8 volunteers who kindly donate their time, skills and experience such as digital support, archiving, data evaluation, governance and more. Their contribution is invaluable and greatly appreciated.

2020-21 was a challenging year for everyone and Prospect Burma was no exception. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is reflected in a drop in income as funders responded to the changing situation, and a drop in expenditure as we were unable to run any of our in-person teaching projects. Throughout the year we worked hard to pivot our projects to respond to a different “normal”, with a particular focus on online learning.

In 2021-22 we expect our income to return to pre-pandemic levels and we are increasing the breadth and depth of our higher education projects to ensure we continue to reach beneficiaries from all corners of Myanmar.

Thank you to all the generous institutions, charitable trusts, foundations and individual donors without whom the work described in these pages would not be possible. More than ever, you are making a difference, where and when it matters. Thank you so, so much for your ongoing kindness.
About Prospect Burma

Prospect Burma is registered in the UK as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. We are regulated by the Charity Commission, the UK Fundraising Regulator, and UK and English law.

American Friends of Prospect Burma is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization registered in the State of Illinois.

HRH The Prince of Wales is our Patron. His Royal Highness takes a close interest in our work and our beneficiaries.

Our work is overseen by 8 trustees, based in the UK and USA. They hold responsibility within UK law for Prospect Burma’s activities including fundraising and programme delivery.

Our formal annual report and accounts is published on our website at https://prospectburma.org/key-documents/