

**International Conference on Burma/Myanmar Studies:  
Burma/Myanmar in Transition: Connectivity,  
Changes and Challenges: University Academic Service Centre (UNISERV),  
Chiang Mai University, Thailand, 24-26 July 2015**

**Gender Identity and Female Education of Akha National Living in  
Kengtung Township, Shan State (East), Myanmar**

**Dr. Than Pale**

**Professor**

**Department of Anthropology**

**University of Yangon**

**July, 2015**

# **Gender Identity and Female Education of Akha National Living in Kengtung Township, Shan State (East), Myanmar**

Than Pale  
Professor, Department of anthropology  
University of Yangon

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the gender identity of Akha national and female education of Akha living in Kengtung Township, Shan State (East), Myanmar with the focus on identities of masculinity and femininity of Akha. In addition, this study intends to elicit the education of the Akha women for gender mainstreaming in formulating development planning in the study areas. Data were collected from three villages; Hwe Yoke 1, 2 and Naung Hlam in MongHkun village tracts, in Kengtung Township, Myanmar by using qualitative methods. IDI (in-depth interview), KII (key informant interview), IGI (Informal Group Interview) with Akha men and women including informal conversation were employed to get the data. The findings illustrated that politeness, respects, skill at household tasks and field tasks and wearing head-dress are important for married Akha women. Having a good management and social dealing with other people are also critical for Akha men. This paper examined that gender identity of Akha are concerned with qualification of Akha man and woman. This identity is closely related to education of female Akha. Local Akha people thought that daughters must do household tasks and field tasks which are important to be a good girls. Their traditional attitudes are influenced on the education of girls because they expected only to be a good housewife in the family. This study showed that the majority of Akha girls and boys finished in the primary level and very few boys can attend in the middle and higher levels. In this case, it is found that socio-economic condition plays an important role in studying for higher level education. It is evident that these situations are the main causes to limit female's access to education. With respect to education, gender disparities in schooling were found in the study areas. Akha women need to be educated because women's empowerment is important for community development in the study areas.

**Keywords:** gender identity, masculinity, femininity, head-dress, traditional attitudes, gender disparities,

## **Gender Identity and Female Education of Akha**

### **Introduction**

Gender, as a principle of socio-cultural organization, varies between cultures; it is subject to change through time; and it interrelates with other modes of categorization such as age, class, and cast so that the identity" woman" will also differ in a given culture, depending on whether she is young or old, high or low class and so on (Grijins, 1992).

Ghosh (2012) described that gender identity is defined as a personal conception of oneself as male or female. This concept is intimately related to the concept of gender role, which is defined as the outward manifestations of personality that reflects the gender identity. Gender identity, in nearly all instances, is self-identified, as a result of a combination of inherent and extrinsic or environmental factors; gender role, on the other hand, is manifested within society by observable factors such as behavior and appearance. For example, if a person considers him a male and is most comfortable referring to his personal gender in masculine terms, then his gender identity is male. However, his gender role is male only if he demonstrates typically male characteristics in behavior, dress, and/or mannerisms. In sociology, gender identity describes the gender with which a person

identifies ( i.e., whether one perceives oneself to be a man, a woman or describes oneself in some less conventional way), but can also be used to refer to the gender that other people attribute to the individual on what they know from gender role indications ( clothing, hairstyle, etc.).

Helliwell (1993) emphasizes that a conceptual distinction is made between sex, which is to do with bodily or physical features, and gender which is to do with the set of cultural constructions associated with those bodily differences in any particular setting. In other words, cultures assign attributes - ways of dressing, behaving, and so on - to the cultural “categories” male and female; and these cultural elaborations, symbols, and values can vary considerably between different societies (Firth, 1995). Therefore, what it means to be a man or a woman and what “manhood” and ‘womanhood’ might constitute are often expressed in varied ways. They are not homogenous, universal categories of identity. Gender identity may be affected by a variety of social structures, including the person's ethnic group, employment status, religion or irreligion, and family. It can be changed from time to time.

Societies are changing more rapidly today than ever before because of globalization processes. Such changes in society effect the socialization of children. Socialization has been defined as intergenerational transmission of culture (Williams, 1972). Other scholars believe that individuals are socialized from an early age to follow a normative set of masculine or feminine behaviours that are traditionally defined to include domestic activity and caretaking for women and breadwinning and providership for men (Marini and Brinton 1984).

Therefore, gender identity is closely related to traditional culture of people. In this point, it should be known whether education is related to gender identity or not and how is gender identity influenced on female’s education.

Female education not only directly benefits women themselves but is also important for the survival, growth and development of the children. If a female is married, she has to look after her children as a mother. In this case, educational experiences strongly influence the health care practices. Educational factors greatly influence a person’s life in relation to the health of themselves and their family (World Health Organization, 2009).

In Myanmar, there are over one hundred ethnic groups with diverse tradition. It means that gender identity varies from one ethnic group to another and the role of ethnic identity may differ from community to community. Akha is one of Myanmar ethnic groups, who live in Kengtung, Mong Young, Tachileik, Mong Hsat Township, in eastern Shan State, Myanmar. As gender is concerned with the socio-cultural constructs of male and female identity, it is necessary to understand how Akha choose their children to send the primary, middle and higher level education and whether it is concerned with their traditional customs and their identity. So, Akha living in Kengtung Township was chosen to do research.

The objectives of this paper are

- To elicit Akha traditions and their identity in the study areas
- To explore the qualifications of a good man and a good woman of Akha
- To examine the concept of education of Akha people in the study areas

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Study areas**

Study site was chosen in Kengtung Township, Shan State (East), Myanmar. Mong Khon village tract is chosen for the study areas. The study sites are Hwe Yoke 1, 2 and NaungHlam village (Mong Hkun Village Tract) located in the southern part of Kengtung, Shan State (East). Akha people in the study areas still believe animism and practice Akha’s traditions. It is 20 miles far away from the southern part of Kengtung. There are 28 households in Hwe Yoke (1), 54 households in Hwe Yoke (2) and 42 households in Naung Hlam. The total population of the three villages is 705 (see Table. 1). Three villages were chosen to collect the data in Kengtung Township.

**Table 1. Numbers of household and population according to village**

Name of village	Household	Male	Female	Total
Hwe Yoke 1	28	75	62	137
Hwe Yoke 2	54	156	145	301
NaungHlam42	142	125	267	

**Source: Information from village head in each village**

### **Data collection**

This study was conducted from September 2010 to November 2010. Qualitative methods were mainly employed in this paper. Individual interview and informal conversation with married Akha men and women (between 20 and 50 years old) were employed to get masculinity and femininity data. At least 10 males and 10 females in each village for IDI (Individual in-depth interview) were chosen and seven KII (Key informant interview) were included to collect the data about traditional customs of Akha. FGD (Focus Group Discussion) with Akha women was not successful because of language barrier. As some of Akha men can understand Myanmar language, IGI (Informal Group Interview) was made with Akha men in the study areas. One IGI with Akha males was conducted in each village. Total of four IGI were conducted for data regarding traditional attitudes on education, identity of local people, decision making in schooling in the family. Three interpreters (two Akha males and one Akha female) were used for data collection. Taking photograph and recording tapes were used in this research.

During the fieldwork, intensive survey was conducted. Interviewing with Akha men and women at day time was conducted and home visit at night was carried out in order to conduct "informal conversation".

## **Findings and discussion**

### **Background to the village**

In the study areas most of Akha people are animists and some are Buddhists but they do not abandon their traditional customs. These three villages are built with Akha's traditional customs. Each village has village gate which is important for animist Akha. They believe that evil spirit cannot enter into the village gate. Each village has village founder leader (dzoema), who is responsible for leading community-based ceremonies and he plays an important role in village gate building. If village founder leader dies, his son will be got his position. Akha people follow their traditional rules until now in the study areas. Therefore, spiritual leaders play an important role in health curing. Akha practice patrilineal kinship system and when daughter marries, she has to follow to her husband. They do mainly shifting cultivation and they make alcohol to sell in Mong Khon village market. Women play an important role in these tasks in the household. Traditionally, Akha women carry out domestic tasks such as cooking, feeding for animals, searching for vegetables, weaving and field tasks. Children learn daily activities of parents by observing. Akha women are not involved in decision making on community works. Women follow men's instruction in community activities.

### **Concepts of masculinity and femininity**

In the study areas, Akha emphasizes on behaviours of men and women for a being a good feminine and masculine. Most of the Akhas said that both Akha males and females must have shame which is a basis for being a good feminine and masculine. It is found that physical features are not important for being feminine. They recognize that politeness in speaking, having self-respect, skill at hill site cultivation and being a good house keeper which are needed to be a good feminine. They said that "a woman must do housework very well, skill at hillside cultivation which is the important to be a good woman".

The Akha's traditional culture strongly restricts the social relation between the younger and the elder. If someone misbehaves to the elder, the organization dislikes that person and he is

assumed as not a good man. Akha parents always teach their children how to behave towards the older people. Traditionally, Akhas always pay respect to elders not only at home but also outside the family. Young men avoid disputing in front of the elders. At the time of having a meal, the eldest person has the first priority to take the food. Paying respect to the elders is a lovely behavior in Akha society. Young males avoid looking at elders straight in the eye. If the young man interrupts talking of an elder man, he is recognized as a rude person in Akha society. Concerning attitudes, young people respect and obey the elders. They take advice from elders. Parents teach their children how to live to be a good man and woman.

In Akha society, the purity of girls is a precious matter and they maintain their respectable behaviours. Mother always tells her adolescent daughters not to stay intimately with boys before marriage. If a girl gives birth to a son or daughter before marriage, the whole family members including their relatives are marked as impure generation in the village and all the family members are disrespected in that society. Moreover, if she bore a son, his name will not be listed in their generation. No Akha man wants to marry the girl who made a shameful important mistake in the Akha society. Therefore, mothers look after their daughters to be a good girl and not to make mistakes. If Akha man or woman made mistakes before marriage, this man or woman was recognized as not a good man or woman.

The research information indicated that Akha children learn their traditional customs and their daily tasks from their parents in a family by observing their activities. It can be found that parents also directly influence on the children's household labour allocation patterns. Akha adolescent girls are trained to have self-respect and to be skillful at household tasks as well as field tasks by the mother. Akha men choose their life partners based on qualification of Akha girls.

Similarly, fathers teach sons about the work related with cultivation and daily activities not only at home but also in the field. If a young man talks his opinion against the opinions of elders about the ritual, he has no shame. To be ashamed of doing wrong is part of carrying Akha customs. Every animist Akha must understand their traditional culture.

Akha people in the study areas always pay attention to the sayings of their ancestors and maintain their genealogical culture. As Akha practise patrilineal kinship system, genealogical knowledge is very important for Akha men. So, young male children starting from 9-10 year old age learn their genealogical knowledge and identities of critical ancestors from father. Akha old men do not like the one who cannot recite his genealogical list. Akha men pass down their genealogical knowledge to their male children. As a son may be head of the household in the future, male activities are taught by father. Akha man, who has ability to solve the problem like difficulties in field tasks and to look after the safety of the whole family, is recognized as being masculine. Not only he must have good qualities to manage the household but also he must have good socialization with other people. Akha men entertained the guest in front of the house (sitting room) and women did not join at the meeting talks. Most of the Akhas assume that duty of hospitality is men's responsibility. They said that men mostly entertain the guests in ceremonies and most guests from neighboring villages are men. As most of the Akha men can speak at least three languages; Shan, Lahu and Myanmar, Akha men are involved in social talks in the study areas. It is a part of good qualities of Akha men.

### **Akha women's identity on head-dress**

Akhas value their traditional costumes. There are types of traditional dress according to age. As Akha women's dress are decorated with silver coins, silver buttons and beads, Akha women's dress is so elaborate. For Akha girl, there are three types of traditional head-dress according to age. One is at age 13 to 16 and at age 17 the girl changes for the head-dress of the adult woman. And the last head-dress is worn after marriage.

The head-dress is Akha's identity. Akha's head-dress style varies based on lineage. In the study areas, married Akha women always wear the head-dress and the woman who wore Akha head-dress, is presumed as a graceful woman. Even when Akha man married to a woman who is not

Akha, she has to wear Akha dress in daily life and follows Akha traditional customs. It can be said that traditional dress for married Akha women is Akha's identity. Even when a woman is sleeping, she does not remove her head-dress. Akha women remove it when washing her hair. The Akha woman who takes off her head-dress, as she breaks Akha's customs, she is despised by the Akha in the village. If Akha woman wears head-dress, it can be easily known that she is married woman wherever she goes. In the study areas, every Akha man wants his wife to wear her head-dress. It is a symbol of marriage. It can be said that wearing head-dress is one of the Akha's identities.

### **Perception on education by Akha people**

According to the research information, most of local Akha people are non-educated people and they did not finish even in the primary level. They did not interest education. They thought that sons have to skill at field tasks and daughters must do household tasks and field tasks. If they are skillful at field tasks, it is enough for their livelihoods. They thought that sons will be head of household in the future so that sons are chosen to study in education. Their traditional attitudes did not value the education of girls and they are expected to be a good housewife in the family. This situation is mainly caused to limit female's access to education.

In the study areas, there is only a primary school. Both boys and girls get equal chance to attend to the primary school. If the students pass primary level, they have to attend to the middle school about 2 ½ miles far away from the village. It takes one hour on foot to reach the middle school. Because of physical distance, poor road condition in the rainy season on foot and inconvenient going to the small hill by bicycle, both most of Akha boys and girls dropped out of the middle school level.

If the children attend middle school level in Kengtung, parents have to support to them with money for accommodation, school fees, and food costs. It is the main problem for them. In the poor families, it is believed that both boys and girls are quitting school to engage in economic activities to contribute to the survival of their families. After dropping out school, the boy helps with his father in the field and works laborer in the field or as caring cows or buffalos. Girls do domestic tasks as well as field task with their mother. So, there are very few chances to continue high school levels for the children from poor family.

Most of Akha parents said that if they have enough money, both son and daughter can learn middle school level without distinguishing son and daughter. Some parents from poor families said that if they can send only one to continue middle school level, they choose son. One mother said "I prefer son for education because I am confident to send son who can stay at any place and he will lead his family in the future". So, it can be assumed that boys get a greater chance of education than girls. They said that it is mainly based on economy of local Akha people. It is said that husband and wife together make a decision for their children schooling. Very few of children from well-to-do family stay in Kengtung or Tachileik and attend middle and high school level there. It is clear that only children from well-to-do person family get the chance to continue studying higher level education. It reveals that socio-economic status plays an important role in education. With regards to this, fifty five years old man from well-to-do family living in Hwe Yoke 2 said the following information concerning education of their children. He said:

*"I have two sons and two daughters. Now, two sons are graduated and one daughter is attending in the "Education College, in Taunggyi". The youngest daughter failed two times in her tenth standard. But, I sent her to boarding house in Kengtung to take exam in 2010. She passed her tenth standard in 2011". Two sons are government staffs in his family.*

According to above information, it is stated that socio-economic situation plays an important role in studying higher education level.

**Table 2. Students attending in Primary school in the study areas, from 2008-2009 to 2010-2011**

Level of Standard	2008-2009		2009-2010		2010-2011	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
First Standard	11	8	19	14	12	13
Second Standard	15	8	8	8	15	13
Third Standard	5	3	12	7	8	8
Fourth Standard	10	6	5	1	12	7

**Source: Primary school in the study areas**

Table 2 showed that the numbers of boys and girls students attending in the primary level within 2008- 2011. According to field survey, after the primary level, the numbers of students in the middle and higher level were gradually reduced. In 2009-2010, five male students in the study areas applied to the Nationality Youth Resource Development Training School, Kengtung for attending middle school. Only two male students were chosen to learn in the middle school and female students are not included to attend middle school. This school is free for accommodation, meal cost and school cost for the students and if a student is chosen, he or she gets chance to attend up to tenth standard. Similarly, in 2010-2011, not only Akha female but also Akha male did not apply the middle school. Even schooling is free for both males and females, as their labour is needed in their field, home and work place, they did not apply to attend the school. According to the information from 2008-2009 to 2010-2011, there was no female students in the middle school level in the study areas. It can be seen that even the numbers of attending male students at the middle also are not much if it is compared the numbers of passing fourth standard in the local areas.

According to documents of Nationalities Youth Resource Development Training School, Kengtung, the following numbers of Akha males and females are attending from fifth to tenth standard.

**Table 3- Numbers of Akha students attending in Nationalities Youth Resource Development Training School, Kengtung from 2010-2011 to 2014-2015**

Year	Male	Female	Total
2010-2011	67	28	95
2011-2012	73	32	105
2012-2013	76	30	106
2013-2014	83	33	116
2014-2015	78	30	108
	377	153	530

**Source: Nationalities Youth Resource Development Training School, Kengtung, 2015**

Table 2 shows that these documents are the numbers of males and females attending from the fifth standard to tenth standard in Nationalities Youth Resource Development Training School, Kengtung. The numbers of Akha males are evidently increased than females. These students come from different places. The numbers of female students are increasing year by year. This situation is leading to empower in education for Akha girls.

### **Obstacles from primary to secondary schooling**

There are many reasons concerning dropped out of school for male and female students. First, there may be economic problem. Even they will get a chance to attend the school, pocket money will be sent monthly to them. Most of parents cannot afford to send money for it. Second, knowledgeable parents and well-to-do parents interest their children to send middle school and high

school level. Children coming from these families get the chance to attend to the middle school. Third, elders and parent's perception on daughters is important for female's education. Most Akha parents in the study areas do not want to send their daughters to another town and some daughters themselves do not want to go to attend school in another place. They want to live with their mothers by helping household chores and field tasks. Especially, mother needs female's labour at home at busy time in the field. If female marries, she has to follow to her husband so that she has to skill household tasks. Fourth, as money limits for schooling, parents prefer to sons for schooling. Sons may be head of household in the future so that they get more chances than daughters in schooling. It can be found that these factors create less female attend schooling.

Although the numbers of female students increased in the fourth standard, there was less female's enrolment in the middle school level. It reveals that there is evidently gender disparity during from 2008-2009 to 2010- 2011. Table 2 shows that Akha parents favor to son concerning education. There are very few students attending school by staying hostel or relative's house. Twelve percent of students stay with relatives or hostel and attend middle school and high school. With regard to it, lack of enough money for school costs, meals costs and accommodation expense, etc., are important factors for schooling.

In the real situation, if the students pass primary level, they have to attend to the middle school about 2 miles far away from the village. It takes one hour on foot to reach the middle school. Physical distance, poor road condition and lack of transportation create to drop out of school for the students. In the poor families, it is believed that both boys and girls are quitting school to engage in economic activities to contribute to the survival of their families. Both boys and girls do part time labourer in the other's field. They get 2000 kyat for a day. It is a support for their family. So, there are very few chances to continue high school level for the children coming from poor family.

### **Chances of Akha girls in Education**

There are chances to attend school for males and females. Both males and females living in mountainous regions, Eastern Shan State are accepted to attend to the primary, middle or high school without giving accommodation, school fee, meal costs, etc. by Nationality Youth Resource Development Training School, in Kengtung. But, there are limitations concern getting this school. First, they prefer children from orphans. Second, children from one-headed household especially female-headed household and third, the poorest households are chosen to stay this school without distinguishing boys and girls. So, in the study areas, no every student gets this chance because of limitation.

But, there is another chance for girls. Vocational Training of Women's Centre in Kengtung was opened in May, 2010 by the Social Welfare Department. It is only for female students. Any female national is accepted from the fifth standard to eighth standard by Vocational Training of Women's Centre in Kengtung. All education expense, accommodation and meal costs are free for the students. For 2010-2011 Academic Years, thirty female students were accepted. It is a plan to extend to the tenth standard. There are limitations to accept female students like the above procedure. However, there may be good chances for both local female Akha and other female nationals. It leads to improve female's life in these regions.

### **Changes of the concepts on education of Akha female**

Very recently, there is a positive trend in parents' attitude on education. Some of Akha parents and knowledgeable local Akha people became to be interested in female's education due to their awareness around their community. They want their daughters to be school teachers and government staffs. They want to their daughters to continue studying in Middle and Higher Level. Local Akha said that "if affiliated Middle School is opened in the village, it may be convenient for females".

Three Akha females in Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon were interviewed about the concept on education of the Akha. They come from Tachileik and are attending Master of Arts in Community

Development and Master of Theology. One of interviewees said that “my parents encourage me to continue studying for getting higher degree. I’ve got only one brother but he was not interested in education. He worked for earning in border areas as part-time job and now he is not only drunker but also drug user. She said that most of parents are facing these situations about their sons in Tachileik. In the past, Akha parents preferred to sons in the education but nowadays, parents consider to the daughters to send the higher level school. She said that parent’s concept on education is very important. She thinks that it is related to environment, religion and social communication and social activities. Most of Akha Christian’s villages have women committees which lead to support to women for empowerment in the villages. For example, young females are supported to learn sewing machines by the Akha women committee. In the study areas, it cannot be seen that there is no Akha women organization and no NGO program for women. With regard to community affairs, when Akha men make a meeting about village affairs, Akha women are not included. Only Akha men are main decision makers and Akha women follow men’s instruction until now. Akha men are main decision makers in conducting community activities.

With regards to schooling, another Akha female (Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon) said that my village is situated besides the Kengtung-Tachileik highway road and 20miles far away from Tachileik. As transportation is convenient, most of Akha girls attended to middle school level by using bicycle or motor bike but only some of Akha girls from knowledgeable parents continue studying in high school level. With regards to education, three of Akha females said that both males and females get equal chance in education. Nowadays, Akha parents emphasize on girl’s education in their village.

### **Health care system**

The health care management system of local Akha is not modernized. They still practice animist belief in health care system. If someone feels serious illness, local Akha people first seek according to instruction of traditional practitioner. Dog is used in spiritual curing. Young people follow elder’s suggestions about health care system in the study areas. If there are more educated people in the village, it may be gradually reduced traditions concerned with sacrificing animal for health in the young generation. Thus, it is important for the new generation to be educated in order to make right decision about health. In health caring within a family, women are the main care takers in preparing food and medicine. So, Akha women need to be educated. Education and health is very important to develop Akha society. Livelihood strategies are interrelated to health as well as the level of education.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

According to the results, it was realized that the value of gender is identified by their qualities of feminine and masculine. The findings indicated that Akha males appreciate those women who possess the capability and good management in housework, field tasks and good characters of females. Physical features are not important for Akha men in choosing as a bride. Married Akha woman always wears traditional head-dress and it is one of identities that specifies as a married woman. Most of Akha women living in other places wear only their head-dress in festivals, rituals, and wedding ceremonies. Until now, married Akha women in the study areas keep on wearing head dresses as their identity.

The survey results indicated that Akha parents wish their daughters to be skillful in field tasks and household chores since agriculture is the main livelihood in this society. Parents cannot invest much money for children education because of their economic bad economic situation. Akha girl children do not desire to attend middle school level in another place which is not only far from their home but also bad transportation. Akha boys got more chances than Akha girls to continue education because parents are more confident to send their sons for schooling. It is sure that educational gender differences in study areas are closely related to the economy, traditional attitudes and long distance which affect differences in the educational attainment of boys and girls.

According to 2014 Myanmar Census data, the total population of Shan State is 5824432. Among them, 2910710 are males and 2913722 are females. There are marked differences literacy rate among States and Regions, with the Yangon Region registering the highest literacy rate at 96.6% and the Shan State has the lowest at 64.6%. In all states in Myanmar, males generally have slightly higher literacy levels than females. It was stated that in Shan State, male literacy rate is higher than female. There are 70.3% of male and 59.4% of female in literacy rate (The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census) in Shan State. According to Shan State Census Report 2014, there are 6150 male and 4406 female who are attending in middle school level in Kengtung Township.

According to above information, it is found that female attended rate in the middle school level, in Kengtung township is lower than male students. Particularly, it can be seen the difference between Akha boys and Akha girls (see table 3).

Livelihood activities are closely related to the qualification of education. There is a much literature available at national and international level on gender inequality in education and its impacts and consequences. It is described that there are many empirical evidences that, increase in female education improves human development outcomes such as child survival, health and schooling (World Bank 2007). This data points out how importance the role of mother education in all societies is. Studies focusing on developing countries have found girls education particularly important for the welfare of the family and the future development. Many empirical studies conclude that increased schooling of the mother is associated with larger effects on child's health, schooling and adult productivity than increased schooling of the father (Schulz, 2001).

With regards to health care management, Akha spend much time on family health especially preparing food and medicine. Therefore, Akha women need health care knowledge for caring family members. Livelihood strategies are interrelated to health as well as the level of education. Therefore, it can be assumed that if Akha women are educated, their livelihoods, health care system and decision making in the household may be changed gradually. The educational level of the wife has been considered as an important factor in household decision-making. With regard to this, Germain and Smock(1974) have suggested that the roles of women in division of labour and decision-making in the family were determined by the quality of education they had received. Similarly, Oppong, (1970) has noted that households in which wives have higher education are more likely to have joint financial arrangements and to make decisions together.

Education plays a major role not only for individual's opportunities in society, but also for the productive capacity and wellbeing of a household. Gender inequality in educational levels is important for a wide range of outcomes; including malnutrition, health, employment opportunities, and technology adoption, all of which ultimately affect household incomes and economic growth at the national level (World Bank, 1999). With regards to this, it is found that Akha female's education is linked to socio-economic condition and concepts on education of local Akha people. Thus, it is very important to upgrade the role of education for Akha females in this community. Women empowerment is very much needed for community development.

The findings showed that the basic cause of this is the financial reason and as stated above if a family could not afford to educate all the children or where a child was needed to help the parents in the house or in the fields or to look after its siblings, it was a girl rather than a boy who was kept away from school. In Akha communities, women are responsible for taking care of the whole family but their works are invisible and undervalued in many cases.

Now, Government is implementing with the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022). The National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022) was drawn up under the leadership of the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs and in collaboration of relevant Ministries, Gender Equality Network, United Nations Gender Theme Group, UN Agencies, INGOs and Local NGOs and started to be implemented in October 2013. The Plan was formulated containing (12) critical areas based on UNCEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action and Millennium Development Goals. These twelve areas are "Women and Livelihoods", " Women and Health", "Women and Education and Training", Women and Emergencies", "Women and the





Figure 6. Married Akha women worn head-dress in daily life



Figure 7. Primary school Figure 8.

Akha mother and her daughter before going to the school

## References

1. Firth, R. (1995). *“Male and Female” in Developing Southeast Asia*, Oxford, Washington: Berg Publishers, Cross-cultural Perspectives on Women, 14, pp.3-10.
2. Germain, A., and Smock, A. (1974). “The Status and Roles of Ghanaian and Kenyan Women: Implications for Fertility Behaviour”, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, September 1, 1974.
3. Ghosh, S. (2012). Definition of gender identity. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender\\_identity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_identity)
4. Government of the Union of the republic of Myanmar (2013). National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women 2013-2022. Social Welfare Department.
5. Grijns, M. (1992). “Tea-pickers in West Java as Mothers and Workers. Female Work and Women’s jobs’, 127, pp. 104-19.
6. Helliwell, C (1993), “Women in Asia: Anthropology and the study of Women”, in Grant Evans (ed), *Asia’s Cultural Mosaic: An Anthropological Introductions*, Singapore.

7. Marini, M. M., Brinton, M. C. (1984). "Sex Typing in Occupational Socialization" Pp. 192-232 in Sex Segregation in the Workplace: Trends, Explanations, Remedies, edited by B.F. Reskin. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.
8. Ministry of Immigration and Population (2015). The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census
9. Oppong, C. (1970) 'Conjugal Power and Resources: An Urban African Example' Journal of Marriage and the Family, Vol. 32, No.4 (1970), 676-80.
10. Schulz, T. P. (2001). Why governments should invest more to educate girls, World development, Vol.30, No 2, p.207-226.
11. Willams, T, R. (1972). The socialization process: a theoretical perspective. New York: Random.
12. World Health Organization (2009). Women and Health: today's evidence tomorrow's agenda.
13. World Bank. (1999). Gender, Growth, and Poverty Reduction. Africa
14. World Bank. (2007). "Gender inequality, poverty and economic growth".