Moving beyond trauma

Can war survivors ever get back to normal life? After almost six decades of civil war, displacement and military rule, Myanmar is still fractured by a widespread climate of latent fear and insecurity. The conflict between non-state armed groups and the Burmese military included systematic human rights violations against civilians. The killings, torture, rape and forced labour left deep scars on women and youths in particular. The violence suffered during the war still feeds post-conflict violence, abetted by a culture of silence, impunity and acceptance. Swiss Academy for Development addresses the psychological consequences of trauma and uses sport, dance and play to facilitate collective and individual healing, giving 500 women and 200 youth survivors in Taungoo Township, Kayin State, new skills, confidence and hope.

**DURATION:** 2017-2019  
**CHALLENGE:** Access to Basic Services, Women’s Social and Economic Development  
**COUNTRY:** Myanmar  
**PARTNER:** SAD

**CONTEXT**

The Burmese conflict between armed rebel groups and the military government is considered one of the world’s “longest-running civil wars” and has witnessed systematic human rights abuses, including forced labour, arbitrary detention, sexual violence, torture, and killings. Women and children disproportionately became pawns of the brutal warfare. Today they suffer both from the psychosocial consequences of the trauma experienced during the war and from the post-conflict climate of latent violence and fear, where silence and impunity are the norm. Moreover, they are left unsupported, with no psychological treatment available from the wrecked national healthcare system.
**ACTION**

Working with the Karen Women Empowerment Group (KWEG) in 7 villages of the Taungoo Township in Kayin State, the Swiss Academy for Development (SAD) uses physical activities, dance and play to support traumatized women and youths to cope with trauma, improving their life-skills and self-confidence, building social cohesion and economic autonomy, and ultimately helping them to heal.

Activities in each village include:

- Weekly sport, dance and play sessions, coupled with life skills classes on trauma management
- Community mobilization around the programme
- Counselling and free legal assistance for groups, families and individuals
- Setting up savings and loans groups able to provide seed capital or match funding to start micro-businesses and increase livelihoods.

**EXPECTED RESULTS**

- 500 women and 200 youths increase their psychological well-being, feel safer and embedded in a strong social support network. The entire community benefits from the new forms of socialization and a new sense of solidarity.
- 500 women are financially independent and earn their living through the creation of small businesses with access to new sources of income.
- KWEG and local community-based organisations are able to assess, design, monitor and evaluate development projects effectively.

**LONG-TERM STRATEGY**

Sustainable transformation is only possible if initiatives and projects respond to the needs of their beneficiaries. SAD implements all its programmes in partnership with local organisations, following the principles of inclusion and participation and focusing on solid monitoring and evaluation.