

## Forward Steps

*Taiwan NGOs are offering aid to landmine victims and improving outcomes for disadvantaged children in Myanmar.*

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In 2018, life improved dramatically for Myanmar farmer Saw Lar Htoo when he received a new leg from Taipei City-based Eden Social Welfare Foundation (ESWF) and The Leprosy Mission Myanmar (TLMM). The 50-year-old, who had stepped on a landmine, was among the first beneficiaries of a program between the non-governmental organizations (NGO) aimed at providing prosthetics to 300 people in the Southeast Asian nation by 2020. Under the partnership, ESWF supplies the artificial limbs while TLMM technicians conduct on-site customization.

"Thanks to Eden and the TLMM mobile prosthesis team, I've gotten a new leg without needing to travel a great distance," Saw Lar Htoo said. "I'm grateful for their support because otherwise I'd have a very difficult time earning a living and raising my six children."

Established in 1982, ESWF is committed to helping the physically challenged at home and abroad. The foundation became a member of

the International Campaign to Ban Landmines in 1997, joining global efforts to advance mine clearance and deliver aid to victims. It works with several Myanmar groups on related projects including TLMM and the Eden Center for Disabled Children (ECDC), a separate non-profit with a shared moniker.

Wu Shu-fen (吳淑芬), director-general of ESWF's International Development Division, said that the foundation provides partner organizations with funding and capacity building resources to help them achieve mission objectives over the long term. "Likewise, we seek to empower aid recipients, boosting their self-esteem and improving their chances of earning a livelihood."

ECDC was established in 2000 as Myanmar's first NGO dedicated to aiding children with disabilities. With support from its Taiwan counterpart, the center offers educational, rehabilitation and vocational classes to about 200 youngsters. It also arranges training programs

01. Taiwan nongovernmental organizations are providing a range of educational, medical and social services in Myanmar.
02. A truck operated by The Leprosy Mission Myanmar visits a rural community to offer customization services for prosthetic devices.
- 03 & 05. About 300 landmine victims are expected to get artificial limbs by 2020 under a collaborative program between Taipei City-based Eden Social Welfare Foundation and TLMM.
04. Prosthesis recipients attend a donation ceremony organized by ESWF and TLMM March 13 in Myanmar's Bago Region.

01. Courtesy of Zhi-Shan Foundation  
 02, 03 & 05. Courtesy of The Leprosy Mission Myanmar  
 04. Courtesy of Eden Social Welfare Foundation





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- 01 & 02. The Eden Center for Disabled Children partners with ESWF in offering educational, rehabilitation and vocational classes to about 200 youngsters in Yangon.
- 03 & 04. Taipei-based Zhi-Shan Foundation delivers parenting workshops and offers child care services to disadvantaged families.
- 05 & 06. The day care center established by Zhi-Shan and Plan International Myanmar in the Mandalay Region promotes early childhood education and development.
07. Zhi-Shan CEO Jay Hung, center, is greeted by a young boy during a visit to a rural village.

03 – 07. Courtesy of Zhi-Shan Foundation

for special education teachers and medical professionals, with two ECDC physical therapists completing a four-week course at Changhua Christian Hospital in central Taiwan earlier this year.

### Robust Backing

ESWF's cooperation projects in Myanmar are made possible through support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Every year, the ministry furnishes financial and technical assistance to help Taiwan NGOs expand their impact and presence overseas. Eden aside, groups that have received funding for initiatives in the Southeast Asian country include Taipei-headquartered Zhi-Shan Foundation and the Chit Myit Tar Foundation, a Yangon-based charitable organization established by Taiwan politician Wang Chien-shien (王建煊).

According to Scott Lai (賴銘琪), director-general of the MOFA's Department of NGO International Affairs, Taiwan is home to about 90,000 nonprofits in a wide variety of areas such as education, environmental protection, humanitarian aid, medical assistance and public health. More than 400 cooperation projects initiated by Taiwan groups are currently underway overseas. "Through advancing welfare and contributing their knowledge,

NGOs play a crucial role in enhancing the nation's global visibility," Lai said. "Their activities are an effective form of diplomacy."

On a fact-finding trip to Myanmar in September last year, Lai witnessed firsthand the work of the Taiwan foundations, describing their efforts as impressive and impactful. "Our humanitarian organizations don't simply give disadvantaged people fish, but also teach them how to fish," he said. "The ESWF programs, for instance, are helping children with special needs thrive, and allowing people injured by landmines to rebuild their lives."

Like Eden, Zhi-Shan has for decades worked to improve outcomes for children in need. Since its inception in 1995, the foundation has implemented a raft of educational support programs at home and overseas. Its most recent effort is a community-based early childhood care and development project in Myanmar's Mandalay Region launched in collaboration with the local division of global nonprofit Plan International.

According to Zhi-Shan CEO Jay Hung (洪智杰), Myanmar has the highest infant and child mortality rate in Southeast Asia because of factors like inadequate medical services and poor public health knowledge.

In view of its focus on early childhood development and education, the foundation felt compelled to step in and provide assistance. “Taiwan has substantial expertise in delivering preschool programs, and we want to share this experience with other countries,” Hung said. Early intervention can significantly improve development trajectories, making

child care support one of the most cost-efficient human capital investments, he added.

Over the past two years, Zhi-Shan has worked with Plan International Myanmar to set up three day care centers in Mandalay for kids aged 3 and under. The groups also partner in organizing workshops for parents, teachers and



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volunteers on such topics as educational tools, play materials and teaching strategies.

"Our programs help explain hygiene and nutrition concepts so families are better informed about how to take care of their children," Hung said. "The goal is to foster a holistic early childhood development system." According to Zhi-Shan, more than 2,000 parents and community volunteers have used the child care centers and participated in the workshops to date.

Thanks to funding from the MOFA as well as Taiwan citizens and enterprises, Hung said that his foundation is looking to expand its projects in Myanmar. "Our partnership with the ministry has enabled us to deliver more effective services.

We look forward to further deepening our collaborative relationships in the country," he added.

### Building Bridges

Similarly, Myanmar-born Mike Chao, CEO of the Chit Myit Tar Foundation, said financial support from the MOFA has allowed his organization to scale up its operations. "With the country's low per capita gross domestic product and limited budget for education, health and sanitation infrastructure, the people of Myanmar are in need of assistance in many areas," he said. "We're doing our best to help as many as we can."

Chao, who studied in Taiwan in the 1980s, said he was inspired by foundation founder Wang's desire





to assist those in need, irrespective of race, religion or nationality. “His benevolence left a mark on me, personally. As I was born and grew up in Myanmar, I also feel a great responsibility to do something to help the people here.”

Chit Myit Tar evolved out of a trip Wang and his wife took to Myanmar in 2012. Deeply affected by scenes of poverty, they decided to establish the charity with the goals of boosting access to education and infrastructure. And having witnessed students struggling to concentrate and even fainting during lessons, Wang made providing breakfast his organization’s top priority.

Since commencing operations in 2013, Chit Myit Tar has delivered meals to more than 210,000 pupils. It also builds bridges and schools, cares for orphans and digs wells in rural communities. “Given many children have lost their parents to conflicts or illegal drugs, we offer grants to orphanages to help them improve standards of care,” Chao said. “The poor also bear the brunt of the country’s limited infrastructure, with many villagers, including

students, risking their lives by using rickety bamboo bridges. That’s why we turned our attention to this area.”

According to Chao, working with The Foundation for Childless Aging People in Taiwan, another of Wang’s charities, gave him invaluable insights into areas like fundraising strategies and grant and project management. Such experience is difficult to get in Myanmar given the developing state of the country’s NGO sector, he said. “Because of my involvement in humanitarian aid programs, I’ve realized that it’s truly more blessed to give than to receive.”

The MOFA’s Lai said it is gratifying to see that Taiwan NGOs are helping alleviate poverty and empower disadvantaged children and families in Myanmar. “As an economically and technologically advanced nation, Taiwan has the ability to support global development,” he said. “Through collaboration between public agencies and NGOs, Taiwan is working pragmatically and professionally to contribute to the international community wherever possible.”  

- 01 – 03. Orphanages run by a Buddhist monastery and Christian missionary organization are among the recipients of support funding from the Chit Myit Tar Foundation.
- 04. Chit Myit Tar CEO Mike Chao points to images of the charity’s projects to build bridges and schools, care for orphans and dig wells.
- 05. Disadvantaged families are the biggest beneficiaries of the NGO’s infrastructure work.
- 06. Yangon-based Chit Myit Tar provides meals to schoolchildren.
- 07. Scott Lai, back, left, director-general of the Department of NGO International Affairs under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is joined by Chit Myit Tar staff members in visiting the site of a new bridge built by the foundation with funding from the MOFA.

06. Courtesy of Chit Myit Tar Foundation  
07. Courtesy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs