

# Mapping UNSW Impact Global Development

<b>Primary SDG</b>	<b>5: GENDER EQUALITY</b>
<b>Broad theme</b>	Gender rights
<b>Research</b>	Promoting gender equality through training and research
<b>Impact region</b>	Myanmar, India
<b>Faculty</b>	Law
<b>School/Institute</b>	Law
<b>Academic</b>	Associate Professor Christine Forster
<b>Project partners</b>	Myanmar: UN Women, Hanns Seidel Foundation, Centre for Development and Ethnic Studies (Myanmar), Canterbury Christ Church University
	India: ILS Law College (Pune, India)
<b>Related SDGs</b>	16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
	4: Quality Education

## Elevator pitch

Christine is training and educating government workers, community leaders, students and the law community in Myanmar and India in women's rights, helping to advance the status of women beyond dated and discriminatory laws.

## The Challenge: Myanmar and India's laws discriminate against women

With Myanmar transitioning to a federal model of government, the country's constitution may need reform. Inherited under British occupation, current laws are dated and discriminate against women. In global gender ratings - such as girls' literacy, health of the female population and reproduction rights - Myanmar is ranked one of the lowest in the world. This is despite evidence that gender equality reduces poverty and promotes economic growth.

India has its own challenges for women and girls. Child marriages, violence against women, young girls sent to serve priests sometimes resulting in sex slavery, inequality in inheritance creating dependence issues, and shame and financial insecurity around divorce are some of the issues the female population must contend with. India's laws have been historically interpreted to the letter, leaving little room for interpretation. This is changing, as law makers recognise the need to account for critical perspectives and social impact. Yet few law texts exist to aid and further discussions.

## UNSW's solution: Train leaders in Myanmar, write a book on women's rights in India

In Myanmar, Christine is helping to educate the country's emerging leaders in how to advance women's rights in the constitution and in a federal model of governance. She has been a trainer in women's rights at two programs for over 70 male and female leaders from government bodies and private organisations. In the

course, Christine teaches gender and federalism, and the mechanisms to advance gender equality like a bill of rights, quotas for women in the workforce and government, and measures to counteract power imbalances between federal and state governments. She has recently completed writing a UN policy document on women's rights and the law.

Christine has regularly visited India since 2005 when she undertook a sabbatical there to teach at the ILS Law School. ILS is rated one of the top law schools in the country. During the sabbatical, she went with students to villages to teach villagers about women's rights through a drama production. In 2012, Christine helped orchestrate a joint conference between UNSW and ILS on feminist jurisprudence, and in 2019 UNSW Law is aiming to send 20 students to ILS to study with 20 ILS students. The students will undertake a two week intensive course together taught by Christine and her ILS peer, Dr Jaya Sagade.

Based on over a decade of experience, Christine is co-authoring a book on the human rights of women in India with Jaya Sagade. The book incorporates Christine's experience visiting 16 tribal communities across India with ILS teachers and students. Christine and her ILS peers and students discussed women's rights - around marriage, abortion and divorce – with village communities. Her book, which is the first of its kind in India, is set to be released in 2019. Further funding would aid Christine's next book project on health and medical law in India (also a co-authorship with Jaya Sagade). A chapter outline for the book has already been finalised.

### **The Impact: Influence leaders and law makers, and the next generation**

Christine's work in Myanmar is helping to advance the rights of women. By training and educating emerging leaders, she is equipping them with the knowledge and skills to reform laws, lobby, be advocates, teach others and inform their communities. This creates a groundswell of support for a new constitution that enshrines equal rights for men and women. Her writing of the UN policy document on women's rights will only further support her efforts in Myanmar and India.

Christine hopes her book on women's rights in India will become part of the curriculum at ILS and other universities around the country. This will help to create an informed and progressive new generation of lawyers, law makers and judges on women's rights. The book will also be read by the law community and advocacy organisations, educating them about what steps they can take to influence the law and government policy in favour of gender equality.

### **Researcher**

Associate Professor Christine Forster teaches a number of courses at UNSW Law. Her research expertise is in gender equality in law, women's human rights, gender and constitutions, victims of crime compensatory schemes, and health and medical law. Christine completed her LLB at Otago University, and her PhD at the University of Sydney. She became passionate about gender equality and social justice at a very early age.

Ben Falkenmire 28.02.18