

## GENDERLAB TALK SERIES#1



# WHAT FORM OF FEDERALISM IS SUITABLE FOR MYANMAR?



photo courtesy of the artist

Reflecting on the different political systems and federal arrangements is useful to achieve a country's collective goals. In the process of Myanmar's transition to federalism, Professor Ardeth Maung Thawngmung of the Political Science Department at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, stressed that all models of democracy and federalism are helpful, but they should not be imposed without taking into account the unique features and requirements of a country. Every country needs to adapt or change strategies in response to a changing situation to ensure inclusivity and good governance.



photo source: Nang

The speaker pointed out in her presentation that federalism may be suitable for Myanmar since the written constitution and other legal frameworks are used to distribute authority between the central and the regional governments. Authority is exercised by regional governments in order to protect and recognize the rights of minority groups. It promotes intergovernmental relations while respecting regional diversity. Minority groups in Myanmar may not be adequately represented and their rights may be overlooked by the rule of the majority. Hence, in federalism, individual regions may be able to adjust policies that suit their needs and aspirations, and try innovative practical solutions to address local issues.



photo source: GSCN Facebook

Considering the history of Myanmar and political will of its leaders, how are resource sharing and taxation implemented in this context? How does communication and health care linked to federalism? What medium of communication should be used by the government and the public? How should the education system be like in the country and what should be the language of instruction? It is important to note that communication need to be localized and that healthcare resources have to respond to local needs.



photo source: Nang

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The follow-up dialogue with the participants was focused on the issues and challenges in creating the best form of federalism for Myanmar. Participants have argued whether Myanmar should be ethnicity based or non-ethnicity based. Furthermore, it was discussed which language policy would be effective and practical. Other important factors on language use were also emphasized by the participants such as the role of family, resources of literatures, roles of non-state actors, faith-based organizations and non-profit organization, the feasibility of summer language school, technology and social media interventions. It was noted that federal countries have adopted several strategies and systems that have worked for them while maintaining linguistic diversity.



photo source: Facebook



photo source: Time.com

The speaker emphasized that the people themselves must discuss and decide the best language policy in view of the pros and cons of having a one language or a multi-language system. Several examples of federalism in different countries and contexts were discussed including their basis and establishment of the federal army. Separate states in Myanmar have drafted and developed their own state constitutions. The speaker, who was able to participate in a review process in one of these constitutions, reminded that while the state constitution is more directly related to the people, the link between the federal and state constitutions must be aligned to ensure the division of powers between the state and the federal levels. What should be the next step for Myanmar?

*To know more about details and discussion, please see the summary note.*

**GenderLab**