

## GENDERLAB TALK SERIES#4



# HOW TO ENSURE THAT A FEDERAL SYSTEM UPHOLDS WOMEN'S RIGHTS?



photo courtesy of the artist

Nang Phyu Phyu Lin, an independent consultant and a Gender and Development Advocate, covered a wide range of topics including the history of gender equality and federalism in Myanmar, the challenges and opportunities connected with these systems. Furthermore, the speaker also discussed appropriate ways and concepts for incorporating gender equality into the federalism and federal democracy constitutions.

The speaker provided an insightful overview of the historical context of gender equality and federalism in Myanmar highlighting the opportunities and challenges faced at every level. She emphasized the importance of incorporating gender equality into federal principles as stated in national and international agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It was also stressed to consider the importance of the different perspectives including cultural and customary factors.



photo source: GSCN Facebook

It is important to incorporate the concept of gender equality and social inclusion in the administrative, legislative, and judiciary sectors within the federal constitutional framework, which should include budget to adequately address gender-differentiated needs in social protection, reproductive health, childcare services, and other relevant sectors under Federalism. The speaker emphasized that state constitutions should take into account customary practices at the state level and should be examined with a human rights and gender equality perspectives. When changes are necessary, such review needs to be included in the state constitution.

Within the framework of Myanmar's federal principles, particular attention to the following crucial issues is needed: fair opportunities for livelihood, effective management of natural resources; prevention of violence against women and promotion of safe working conditions for women and other marginalized groups; and promotion of equal opportunities and rights for people of all ethnicities. Every institution is required by the federal constitution to adopt gender policies and provide social protection benefits, such as childcare facilities and assistance.



photo source: MOE, NUG Facebook

## GenderLab Talk Series#4 Gender Equality and Federalism in Myanmar

### Follow-up dialogue with participants



#### WHAT STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES SHOULD BE ENFORCED TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY?

The speaker answered based on a number of international frameworks for women's empowerment and gender equality. Gender disparities in Myanmar is a result of the power dynamics between different groups and organizations, including politicians, religious authorities, and other important stakeholders. Discussions about nation-building have always included the question of how gender equality is necessary in having an effective democratic system. Some people think that gender equality should come naturally if strengthening political institutions is realized. They argue that if politics is functioning well, gender equality will certainly follow. However, this viewpoint ignores the fact that minority problems can exist even under democratic or federal systems, where only the views of the majority are followed. In these situations, the federal government can play an important role in protecting the rights of minorities by facilitating procedures like self-determination and self-governance. The federal government can play an important role to ensure that the state authorities protect gender equality and minority rights, without compromising the fundamental right to self-determination.



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#### WHY SHOULD WE CONSIDER GENDER EQUALITY IN FEDERALISM?

Human rights are the essential foundation of any society. It is critical to treat everyone, regardless of gender, as innately having equal rights. We can lay the groundwork for stability and justice by building a political system based on this idea. The systematic approach emphasizes that gender equality should not be a secondary concern in the political system, but rather a fundamental component from the beginning. If the national government and important stakeholders integrate gender equality into the governance framework's basic structure, we may establish a more inclusive and equitable society for all people. Development of a National strategic plan for women's empowerment is a good example.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990 to measure a country's level of development based on several key factors. Life expectancy is one of these factors, which may vary significantly between males and females due to various reasons. In order to ensure gender equality, she also mentioned the six (6) dimensions to be considered while developing a constitution: (1) access to health care including reproductive health related policies and practices; (2) degree of decision-making power among different levels of the government, media, and parliamentarians; (3) adopting and implementing of quota system in social, political and religious spheres; (4) employment opportunities as well as working conditions; (5) productive roles and time-used of women; (6) GBV responsive program and handling mechanism for all with intersectionality approaches.

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Access to healthcare is an important factor in determining life expectancy. There can be significant differences in life expectancy between men and women. Inadequate health education, unequal access to excellent healthcare services, a lack of reproductive healthcare, gender-based violence, and childcare support for women can all contribute to this inequality. It is crucial to close these gaps and give every individual, regardless of gender, equitable access to healthcare in order to achieve gender equality.

Gender inequality in education can hinder human development and perpetuate social and economic disparities. Societies may empower people, advance gender equality, and enhance overall development by giving men and women equal access to education. It is especially important to ensure that women and girls have access to quality education since it can have a transformative impact on their lives.

Human dignity and social cohesion are also vital aspects of gender equality and human development. Society needs to uphold human dignity, respect the rights, autonomy, and agency of every person, regardless of their gender, recognize the value of diversity and promote social cohesion by fostering inclusivity, tolerance, and equal participation in decision-making processes. Creating a culture that values and respects gender equality promotes social harmony, enhances personal wellbeing, and drives sustainable development.

### WHAT ARE THE EFFECTIVE POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP IN MYANMAR?

One of the specific measures to enhance political participation and leadership is to implement a quota system that ensures women represent at least 30% of political parties, parliaments, and subnational level institutions. The speaker also shared statistics on political representations and quota portions of several countries, as well as indicators on labor force participation, education, and women's political engagement.



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