ENHANCING MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT:
TOWN HALL MEETING INITIATIVES
IN MYANMAR

YAMIN OO

**MASTER OF ARTS
IN PUBLIC POLICY**

**GRADUATE SCHOOL
CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY
JUNE 2023**

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**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED TO CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
IN PUBLIC POLICY**

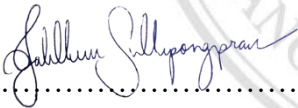**GRADUATE SCHOOL, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY
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THIS INDEPENDENT STUDY HAS BEEN APPROVED TO BE A PARTIAL
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IN PUBLIC POLICY

Examination Committee :   **Advisor :**

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1 June 2023

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Yamin Oo

c

หัวข้อการค้นคว้าอิสระ	การส่งเสริมการมีส่วนร่วมของเทศบาล: การริเริ่มการประชุม
	ศาลากลางในเมียนมา
ผู้เขียน	นางสาว ยามิน อู
ปริญญา	ศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต (นโยบายสาธารณะ)
อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษา	ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร.พบสุข ช่ำชอง

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาการกำหนดและการดำเนินการของการประชุมศาลากลางในพื้นที่เฉพาะในเมียนมา และระบุปัจจัยสนับสนุนและยับยั้งการส่งเสริมการประชุมศาลากลางทั่วประเทศ คำถามการวิจัยได้รับการแก้ไขโดยใช้กรอบการวิเคราะห์ 3 แบบ ได้แก่ แนวทางการศึกษาเชิงสถาบัน กรอบแนวคิดหลายกระแส (MSF) และแนวทางสามเหลี่ยมแห่งอนาคต การศึกษานี้พบว่าวิวัฒนาการขององค์กรกิจการเพื่อการพัฒนา (DAO) ในเมียนมาตั้งแต่ยุคอาณานิคมจนถึงปัจจุบัน มีอิทธิพลต่อการกำหนดและการดำเนินการของการประชุมศาลากลาง โดยระบุว่าองค์กรภาคประชาสังคมเป็นผู้ประกอบการด้านนโยบายที่สนับสนุนนโยบายการมีส่วนร่วมของพลเมือง ซึ่งนำไปสู่การกำหนดการประชุมศาลากลางอย่างรวดเร็วในภูมิภาคซากาอิง งานวิจัยนี้ได้วิเคราะห์สภาพแวดล้อมทางการเมือง ปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้นใหม่ และข้อเสนอเชิงนโยบายที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการประชุมสภาเมืองโดยใช้ MSF และแนวทางสามเหลี่ยมแห่งอนาคตโดยเน้นปัจจัยสนับสนุนและปัจจัยขวางกั้นการส่งเสริมการประชุมศาลากลางทั่วประเทศ ตลิดจนตรวจสอบกฎหมายว่าด้วยการพัฒนา การเป็นอิสระทางการเมือง การดำเนินการก่อนหน้านี้ที่ประสบความสำเร็จ การปรับปรุงการตอบสนอง และความสอดคล้องกับเป้าหมายการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนเป็นปัจจัยสนับสนุน ด้านปัจจัยขวางกั้นได้กล่าวถึงภูมิหลังทางประวัติศาสตร์ของการมีส่วนร่วมของประชาชนที่มีความอ่อนแอ เจตจำนงของเจ้าหน้าที่แต่ละคน และผลกระทบของการทำรัฐประหาร ซึ่งขัดขวางกระบวนการปฏิรูปและสร้างความไม่มั่นคงทางการเมือง จากผลการวิจัย

d

การศึกษานี้ได้ให้ข้อเสนอแนะเชิงนโยบายสำหรับอนาคตที่ต้องการในการส่งเสริมการประชุมศาลากลางทั่วประเทศในเมียนมา ข้อเสนอแนะเหล่านี้รวมถึงการฟื้นฟูเสถียรภาพทางการเมือง การทบทวนและปรับปรุงกฎหมายเพื่อองค์กรกิจการเพื่อการพัฒนา การใช้ประโยชน์จากการดำเนินการที่ประสบความสำเร็จ และพัฒนาแนวทางและคู่มือสำหรับการนำไปปฏิบัติอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ ทว่าการศึกษานี้ยังชี้ให้เห็นถึงการขาดมุมมองจากผู้เชี่ยวชาญ องค์กรภาคประชาสังคม และสาธารณชนอย่างจำกัด แต่ก็มีการให้เสนอแนะว่าการวิจัยในอนาคตควรรวมข้อมูลนำเข้าที่กล่าวถึงข้างต้นมาใช้ศึกษาวิเคราะห์ด้วยจึงจะให้ความเข้าใจที่ครอบคลุมมากขึ้นเกี่ยวกับงานวิจัยในหัวข้อนี้

คำสำคัญ การประชุมศาลากลาง องค์กรกิจการเพื่อการพัฒนา การมีส่วนร่วมของประชาชน แนวทางการศึกษาเชิงสถาบัน กรอบแนวคิดหลายกระแส สามเหลี่ยมแห่งอนาคต

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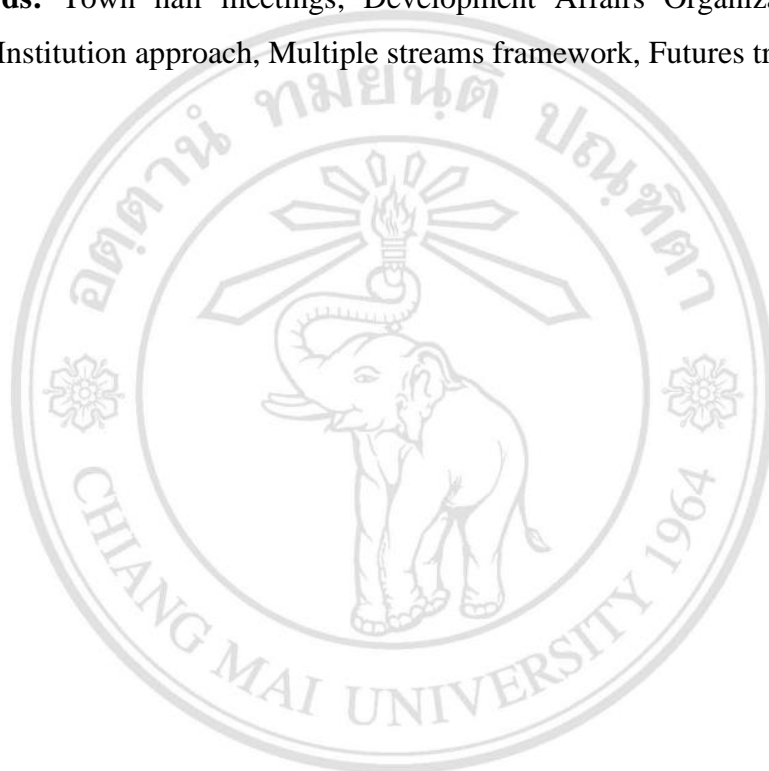|	
Independent Study Title	Enhancing Municipal Engagement: Town Hall Meeting Initiatives in Myanmar
Author	Ms. Yamin Oo
Degree	Master of Arts (Public Policy)
Advisor	Assistant Professor Dr. Pobsook Chamchong

ABSTRACT

This study explores the formulation and implementation of town hall meetings in a specific local area in Myanmar and identifies the supporting and inhibiting factors for promoting town hall meetings nationwide. The research questions are addressed using three analytical frameworks: the institutional approach, the multiple streams framework (MSF), and the futures triangle approach. The study reveals that the evolution of development affairs organizations (DAOs) in Myanmar, from the colonial period to the present, has influenced the formulation and implementation of town hall meetings. It identifies civil society organizations as policy entrepreneurs advocating for citizen engagement policies, which led to the rapid formulation of town hall meetings in the Sagaing Region. The study analyzes the political environment, emerging problems, and policy proposals related to town hall meetings, by using the MSF. The futures triangle approach highlights supporting and inhibiting factors for promoting town hall meetings nationwide. Development affairs laws, political autonomy, successful previous implementations, improving responsiveness, and alignment with sustainable development goals are identified as supporting factors. Inhibiting factors include the historical legacy of weak public engagement, the individual will of officials, and the impact of the military coup, which disrupted the reform process and created political instability. Based on the findings, the study provides policy recommendations for the desired future of promoting town hall meetings throughout Myanmar. These recommendations include restoring political stability, reviewing and updating development affairs laws, leveraging successful implementations, and developing

guidelines and manuals for effective implementation. While the study acknowledges the lack of perspectives from experts, civil society organizations, and the public as a limitation, it suggests that future research should incorporate their inputs to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Keywords: Town hall meetings, Development Affairs Organizations, Public participation, Institution approach, Multiple streams framework, Futures triangle

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Importance of Town Hall Meeting

Citizen participation is crucial in democratic politics as it ensures that government decisions align with the consent of the governed. In a democracy, citizens have both the right and the responsibility to actively engage in public decision-making and stay informed about government policies. Citizen participation goes beyond democracy alone; it also contributes to legitimizing policy development and implementation (Fischer, 2003). Deliberative democratic theorists argue that being "engaged and informed citizenry" is crucial for the functioning of a democratic society, and when citizens engage in thoughtful and informed political deliberation, they can contribute to improved decision-making processes and better public policies both directly and indirectly (Gastil & Dillard, 1999, p.3).

The array of processes that citizens can involve in decision-making is now extensive, starting from "referendums, public hearings, public submission processes, client polling, deliberative polling, town hall meetings, citizen juries, citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, numerous techniques for dialogue, neighborhood councils, and issues forums" (Warren, 2009, p.22). Town hall meetings are public meetings where individuals come together to engage in discussions, propose solutions, and potentially vote on policies (National Apartment Association (NAA), n.d.). These meetings provide an open platform for anyone to participate, ask questions, and express their opinions regarding specific issues or policies (Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), n.d.).

Despite having some arguments on town hall meetings – which are typically characterized by more unilateral power dynamics (Field, 2019), and their limited effectiveness in facilitating meaningful citizen engagement in governance and influencing decision-making processes, the model like 21st Century Town Meeting is the model of being revised town hall meetings to foster citizen deliberation that is well-informed, synthesized, and directly linked to tangible opportunities for action. The 21st

Century Town Meeting provides a practical and effective model for democratic deliberation that addresses the needs of citizens and government officials. This model has successfully engaged numerous citizens nationwide, influencing regional planning, local budgets, and national policy development. By bringing large-scale deliberation with direct connections to decision-makers, the 21st Century Town Meeting contributes to the ongoing efforts in the field of citizen engagement (Lukensmeyer & Brigham, 2002).

According to Reich (1990), deliberation may be time-consuming, resource-intensive, and may not always lead to a definitive consensus. However, it can be more effective in shaping and maintaining mandates compared to approaches focused solely on efficiency or administrative advocacy, where decisions and mandates are influenced mainly or shaped by administrative authorities or advocates (Reich, 1990 cited in Fischer, 2003). Town hall meetings that are well-designed for citizen engagement ensure maintaining the legitimacy and acceptance of the decisions by the stakeholders in policy development.

1.2 Problem Statement

In Myanmar, the policies were made by the directives and commands of the military officers for many decades (from 1962 to 2010), and the involvement of the public was totally lack of in those military eras (The Aisa Foundation, 2016). In 2008, the military dictators announced to return of the country back to constitutional government, and the 2008 Constitution was enacted. Starting in 2011, the process of political and economic transformation was initiated (Hook et al., 2015). Despite the military's withdrawal of its control over politics in the reform process, the practice of policymaking remained highly centralized in the initial reform periods. There was little change in the policy process as to being centered around the highest ranks at the decision-making level and the legacy of the top-down approach, that is, their typical obedience to guided instructions by government officials at lower levels (The Aisa Foundation, 2016).

The civil service was predominantly composed of retired military personnel, limiting the diversity of expertise and perspectives. The research activities of the academic institutions had been limited, and their international engagement had been significantly restricted. This centralized and tightly controlled environment created a

culture of information hoarding, where senior policymakers tended to withhold knowledge, and transparency was not prioritized. Decision-making processes were often influenced by personal relationships and the interests of influential individuals or groups rather than following formal procedures. Informal agreements among powerful individuals played a significant role in shaping policies without robust mechanisms to ensure accountability and balance of power (The Aisa Foundation, 2016).

Gradually, both regimes of USDP and NLD emphasized promoting public participation and improving communication with the public. The transitional government led by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) prioritized several initiatives aimed at enhancing local committees, promoting public participation, allocating resources to support local development, and reforming the role of ward and village tract administrators. The objective was to establish an elected position for these administrators, recognizing their crucial role as intermediaries between the local population and the state. Following the USDP, the National League for Democracy (NLD) government sought to enhance further participation and accountability by encouraging state and region Members of Parliament (MPs) to engage in local affairs actively (Batcheler et al., 2018).

It was also evident that the government agencies at the township level General Administrative Department (GAD) and Development Affairs Organizations or Municipality (DAO) became responsive to the public needs and used social media to expand public engagement (Roberts, 2018). However, regular engagement with the public was lacking, and the research reports recommended holding public meetings or town hall meetings at regular times (Batcheler et al., 2018; Roberts, 2018). According to the city life survey (2018), most of the public perceived that they could not influence the decision-making process of development affairs organizations/municipalities, and they were not even acknowledged well of the tasks and responsibilities dedicated to these development affairs organizations (Ford et al., 2018). Prior to 2019, regular engagement with the public was historically lacking in the municipal sector of Myanmar.

The study aims (i) to examine the implementation of town hall meetings in a specific local area and (ii) to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors for promoting

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town hall meetings throughout the country. Aligned with the study's objectives and focused on exploring the limited use of town hall meetings in Myanmar, the study formulates the following two research questions:

i.   Why and how can Town Hall meetings be formulated and implemented in a specific local area?

ii. What are the supporting and inhibiting factors for promoting Town Hall meetings?

This study will cover the development affairs organizations or municipal sectors in Myanmar.
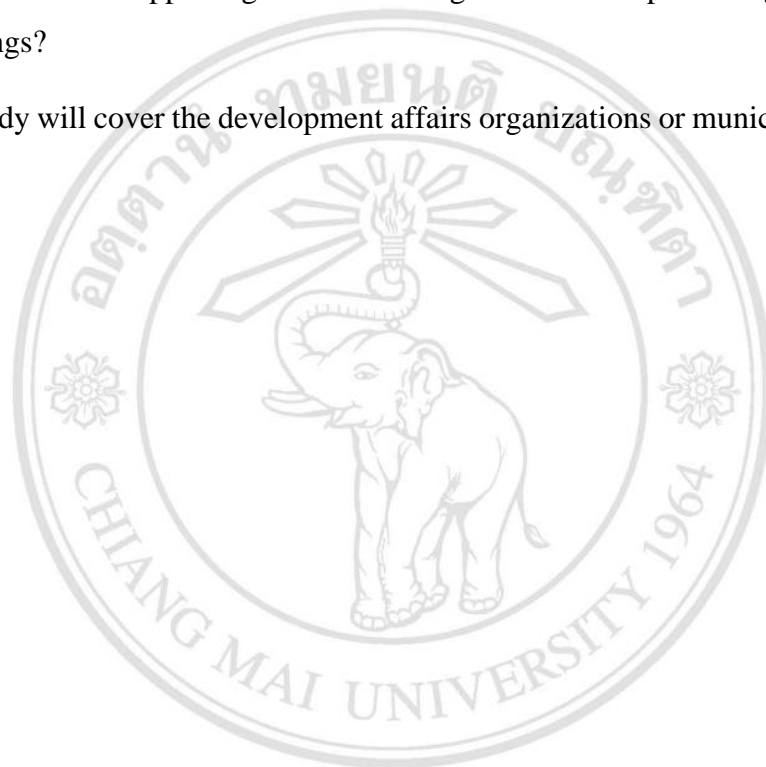
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CHAPTER 2

Background Information of the Development Affairs Organization or Municipality in Myanmar

2.1 Overview of Development Affairs Organizations

Myanmar is a fairly urbanized country with an annual urban population growth rate of 1.7 percent. According to the world bank's estimation for 2021, it is composed of an urban population of 31 percent among the total residing population of about 54 million (The World Bank, 2018). The key urban administration is largely run by the Development Affairs Organizations (DAOs) or Municipalities in Myanmar. The administrative system of Myanmar has structured basically into two levels – The union level and State/ Regional level, excluding the union territory (Nay Pyi Taw). No third-tier government is below the State/ Regional level (Arnold et al., 2015). The Constitution 2008 does not include provisions for the third level of local government below that of the states/regions. Instead, there is a complex local governance system with a strong Union government presence and an unclear relationship with state/regional governments.

The DAOs are under the Department of Development Affairs (DDA) of the state/ regional level governments. In general, DAO offices are located in the urban centers of townships (the administrative system of Myanmar is shown in Figure (Dickenson-Jones et al., 2016). The DAOs are primary service providers for their respective urban areas with a variable range of municipal services: solid waste management, the construction, and maintenance of urban roads and streets, water supply, and spatial and land use planning, then they also oversee local economic governance through business registration and regulation, issuing licenses and permits to local businesses, collecting taxes and fees and holding auctions to operate local ferries and toll roads and so on. (Winter & Mya Nandar Thin, 2016)

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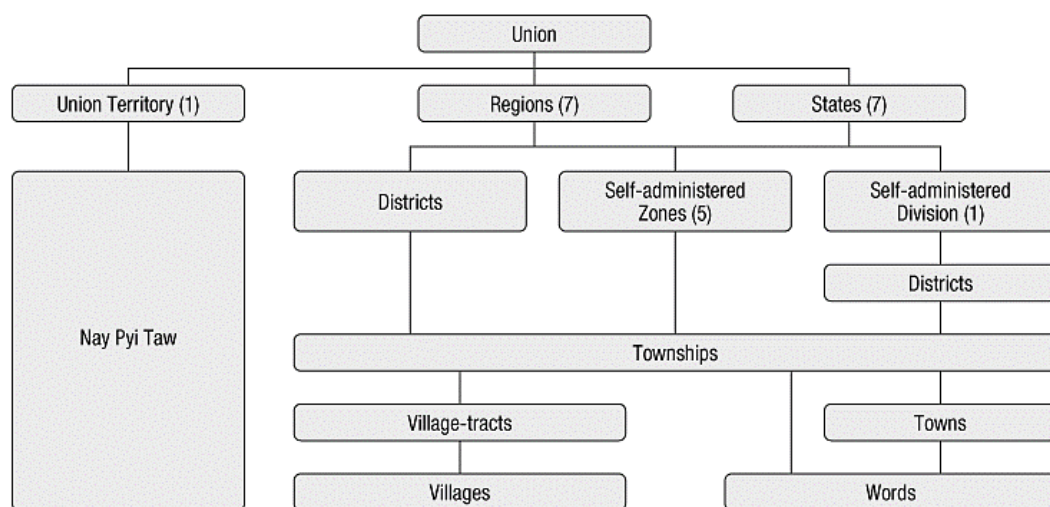
Fig: 2.1 Administrative System of Myanmar

Source: Mie Mie Tin (2013)

There is no specific government body as a single unit or local government organization at the township level administration. As to the complex local governance system, so many departments are excising power and providing their respective services, and these departments have their particular command line either by the union government or the state/ regional governments (Gerhard, n.d.). Hence, DAOs are like in the way of township education departments providing education services within a given township area. In this aspect, DAOs are operating and providing urban-related services in urban parts of a township. However, one key difference is that DAOs are under the full control of state/ regional governments, whereas other departments are accountable to the union-level government bodies. Under Schedule Two of the 2008 Constitution and subsequent reforms, DAOs are under the total control of state/ regional governments. Within the state/ regional governments, DAOs are supervised by the state/ regional minister of development affairs. Each state and region parliament (Hluttaw) had the authority to enact Development Affairs (municipal) Laws for their respective areas (Winter & Mya Nandar Thin, 2016).

Before the military takeover on February 1, 2021, these development affairs organizations at the township level were recognized as the only fully decentralized government agencies because they are unique in some way like they are fully self-funded

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and generally use their revenues in the township where they were collected, and they have significant discretion over revenue use. In addition to that, the DAOs are the only local government actors overseen by a dedicated local committee named Township Development Affairs Committees (TDAC). TDAC had the decision-making power, and the majority of the committee members were elected by the community (Arnold et al., 2015). During February and March 2021, sooner after the military coup, the formation of the committees was repealed with the respective amendment laws by the military junta, and the amendment laws affected ten states/ regions (Myanmar Law Information System, n.d.-b).
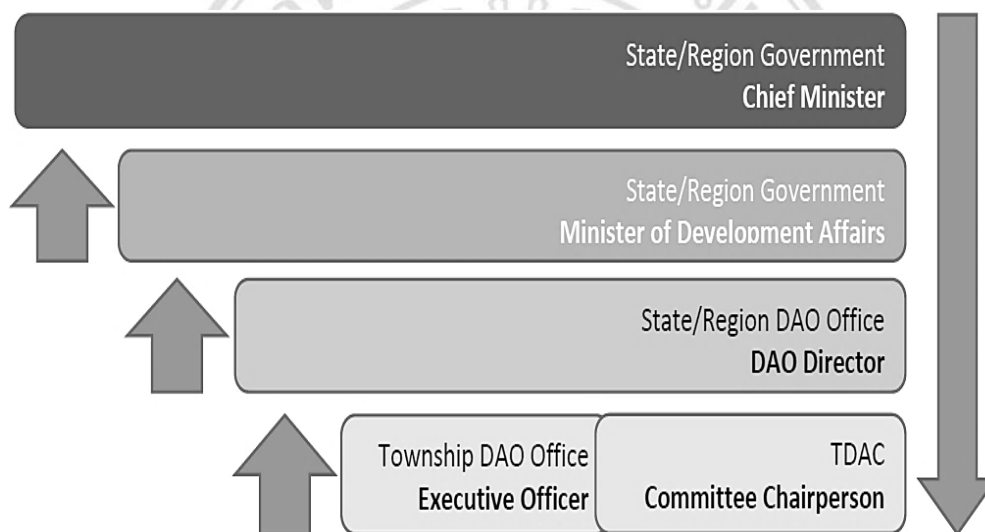
Fig: 2.2 The Structure of Development Affairs Organizations

Source: Arnold, Kempel, Ye Thu Aung, and Kyi Pyar Chit Saw (2015)

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CHAPTER 3

Conceptual Framework

3.1 Tools for Understanding/ Conceptualizing a Public Policy: Institutional Approach and Multiple Streams Framework

Institutional Approach

Peter John mentioned that public policy scholars need to acknowledge both the formal and informal political institutions like rules and procedures, political systems, legislatures, bureaucracy, and jurisdictions (John, 2012b). It was also described that being aware of institutions is critical in considering the power relations among different political pillars or government bodies, the authority and obligations of public officials, and the decision-making process (Schattschneider, 1960, as cited in John, 2012). Understanding how public policy is formulated within political systems requires examining the rules governing decision-making, the powers of decision-makers, the official sequence of the policy-making process, and the constraints that influence decision-makers (John, 2012b).

Despite the institutional approach had been criticized, and it has some limitations, like ignoring political and social backgrounds and failing to analyze over time, space, and sector, the institutional framework is an essential tool to elaborate "the unique character of each country's formal rules and the values shaping a state tradition." Institutions remain significant in mainstream political science discussions of decision-making, and public policy scholars refer to institutions, placing greater emphasis on rational planning, internal politics within bureaucratic systems, and the influence of interest groups. This perspective acknowledges the importance of understanding the rationality behind policy choices, the internal dynamics within government agencies, and the role of external actors, such as interest groups, in shaping policy decisions (John, 2012b).

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Mostly, an institutional perspective views policymaking as a process guided by established institutional structures. In this view, individual choices are influenced by these structures rather than focusing solely on the outcomes. Institutional theory delves deeper into societal structures, including rules, norms, and values, and examines how they shape social behavior. It emphasizes the significance of institutions in policymaking and explores how institutions empower and constrain actors involved in the policymaking process (Mahmud, 2017).

Multiple Streams Framework (MSF)

John F. Kingdon developed the Multiple Streams Framework in his book, "Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies," which comprehensively analyzes the political system's role in public policy. Kingdon's approach recognizes the importance of individual agents, ideas, institutions, and external processes in shaping policy outcomes. Unlike traditional approaches, Kingdon's policy streams approach acknowledges the continuous nature of policy change. It explores the interplay between problem recognition, policy proposals, and political processes, highlighting how these factors influence policy agendas. Kingdon emphasizes that policy formation is influenced by a combination of factors, including the mobilization of policy entrepreneurs and the timing of policy windows (John, 2012a).

According to John Kingdon, it can be said that the policy process comprises three main streams - problem stream, politics stream, and policy stream. When a policy window opens, these three streams are coupled with each other to formulate a policy. It is predictable or unpredictable to open a policy window, which is the added value of the multiple streams framework because it can help explain the changes in public policy. Then, the policy entrepreneurs are critical in the MSF who "invest time and energy in pushing for policy change and who can provide public goods and whomever politicians, experts, or lobbyists can be policy entrepreneurs." Despite being criticized for focusing on agendas rather than implementation processes, the approach provides valuable insights into policy formation. Mostly, the interaction between various actors and the fusion of policy formulation and implementation processes are critical aspects of understanding policymaking (John, 2012a).

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To elaborate on the three main streams of Kingdon, the problem stream emphasizes that situations are not automatically considered problems in an objective sense. They must be defined as problems and different actors can interpret the same situation in various ways. Problem definitions are subjective and occur within policy communities, with advocates known as "problem entrepreneurs." These definitions can emerge gradually or through triggering events, leading to the problem entering the government agenda. On the other hand, the policy stream focuses on policy entrepreneurs who advocate for specific solutions. These solutions may have ideological biases and may not rely on extensive research. Experts develop them, but not all ideas have equal chances of acceptance due to factors like acceptability, feasibility, and cost. The MSF views these solutions as searching for problems to address (Hoefer, 2022).

The political stream involves the interplay of the national mood, elected officials, and interest groups. When a problem aligns with an acceptable solution, and there is political will for action, a policy window opens. Policy entrepreneurs seize this opportunity by connecting problems with policies and garnering support from decision-makers. Successful efforts can result in the enactment of new laws. Policymaking is a random process that relies on effective framing and aligning problems and solutions within a limited timeframe. Social welfare policy creators should skillfully advocate for specific problem definitions and acceptable solutions. Post-election periods and other favorable situations provide better chances for policy decisions. Preparing and having groundwork laid out is crucial, as policy windows can close without similar opportunities arising for a significant period (Hoefer, 2022).
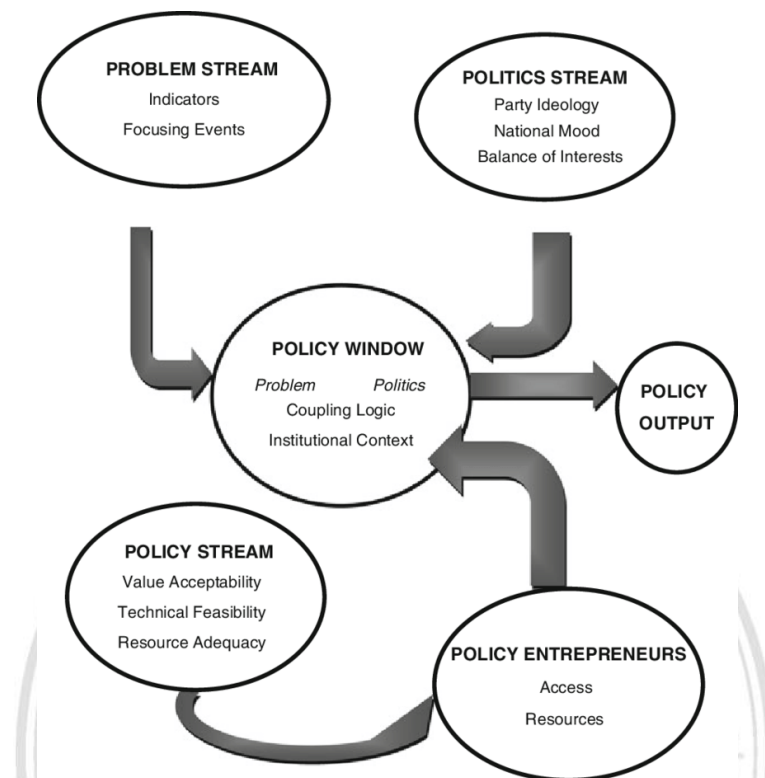
Fig: 3.1 John Kingdom's Multiple Streams Framework

Source: Zahariadis (2017)

3.2 Tools for Mapping/ Transforming the Future: Futures Triangle and Backcasting

The Six Pillars approach, developed by Dator's Manoa school (1979), presents a framework for future thinking that combines theory, methods, and practical application. These pillars, namely mapping, anticipation, timing, deepening, creating alternatives, and transforming, provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding and shaping the future. They can be utilized both as a theoretical framework and as a structured approach within future workshops (Inayatullah, 2008). In this policy study, the futures triangle and backcasting tools will be applied as the theoretical framework for mapping and progressing toward transforming the future.

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Future Triangle Approach

The Futures Triangle is a framework that examines the three dimensions shaping our perception of the future:

- The image of the future acts as a motivational force, inspiring us to move forward.

- The pushes of the present encompass the current drivers and trends that influence and shape the future.

- The weights of history represent the barriers and obstacles hindering the desired change.

By analyzing the interplay of these forces, the Futures Triangle enhances our understanding of the challenges and assists us in envisioning a plausible future(United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2018). The Futures Triangle is a straightforward and efficient approach for comprehending plausible futures and alternative scenarios. It provides insights into the movements and changes within these forces, facilitating a better understanding of the potential futures that can unfold (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2022).
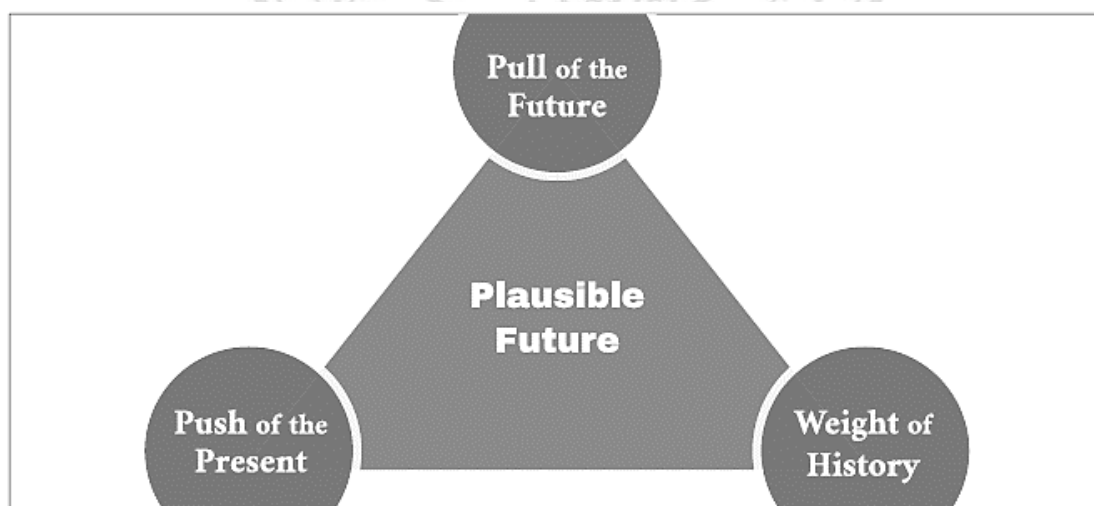
Fig: 3.2 Futures Triangle

Source: UNDP (2018)

Backcasting

Backcasting is a concept initially developed by Robinson (1990) and Elise Boulding and Boulding (1995), and it involves envisioning a preferred future or a specific scenario and then working backward to determine the necessary steps to reach that future. It bridges the gap between the present and the desired future by examining the trends and events that have shaped the current situation over the past years. By understanding the factors that have influenced the present, backcasting helps make the future more attainable. The identified steps towards the preferred future can then be implemented through various approaches, such as strategic planning or action learning, which involve experimentation and deliberate actions to achieve the desired outcomes. Backcasting can also be utilized to prevent worst-case scenarios. By analyzing the steps that led to the worst-case scenario, strategies can be developed and implemented to avoid such undesirable outcomes (Inayatullah, 2008).

Robinson (1990) argued backcasting as a means to counter the common practice of extrapolating the present into the future in forecasting. It is closely linked to the concept of "anticipatory models," which draw insights from the expected future situation (feed-forward) rather than being based solely on past expectations or goals (feedback). Backcasting takes various forms but should not be mistaken for simple "back-planning," as it does not plan from the future to the present. Instead, it aims to comprehend the potential development of a specific future scenario. Backcasting serves as a valuable complement to visioning and other scenario methods (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2018).

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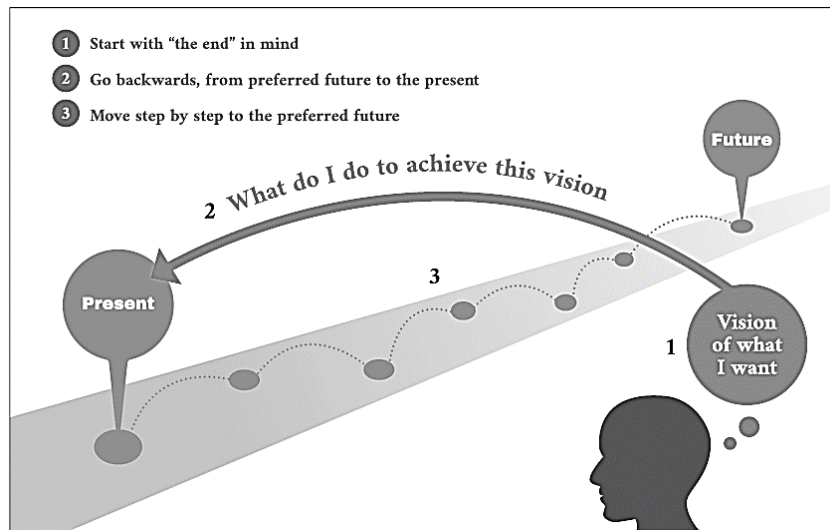
Fig: 3.3 Backcasting

Source: UNDP (2018)
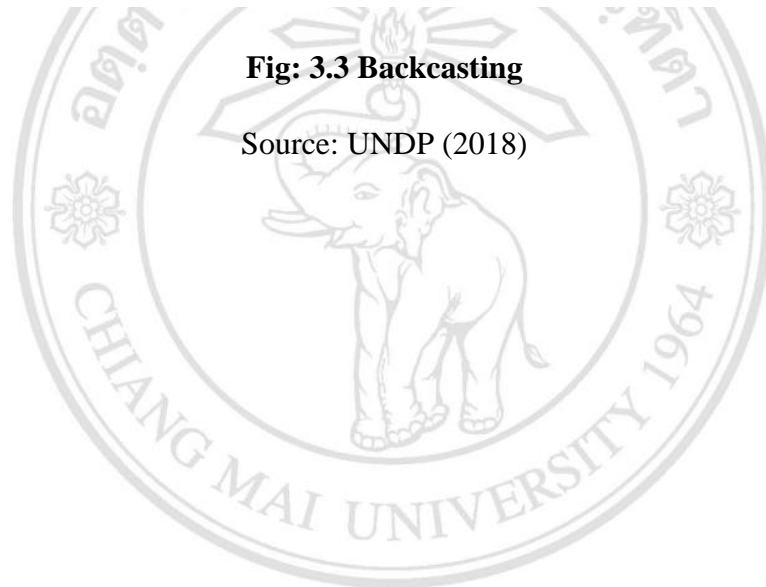
CHAPTER 4

Analytical Frameworks and Research Method

4.1 Analytical Frameworks

The study focuses on exploring the limited use of town hall meetings in Myanmar and achieving the research objectives of examining the implementation of town hall meetings in a specific local area and identifying the supporting and inhibiting factors for promoting town hall meetings throughout the country; the following research questions are formulated:

1. Why and how can Town Hall meetings be formulated and implemented in a specific local area?

2. What are the supporting and inhibiting factors for promoting Town Hall meetings?

To answer the research questions, three policy lenses – institutional approach, multiple streams framework (MSF), and futures triangle approach are applied as analytical frameworks. In addressing the first question, the paper will focus on the whole process or history of laws and policies in the municipal/ development affairs sector within the timeframe of the pre-colonial era to the period before the military coup in 2021 using the lens of 'institutional approach' and support with 'MSF' to explain why and how Town Hall meetings happened. In addressing the second question, the 'futures triangle' is applied to identify push, pull, and weight factors for a plausible future of promoting Town Hall meetings throughout the country.

4.2 Research Method

In this study, the qualitative method was applied, and secondary sources of academic papers, journals, books, reports, respective legal documents, announcements, and websites were highly relied on for the data collection and analysis of the study. Methodologically, the thematic analysis was employed in this paper and the three stages

of data collection, coding, and analysis were involved in the process of addressing the research questions.

Data Collection

The secondary data used in this research were collected from the discussion papers, policy dialogue briefs, notes, released reports from the non-government organizations, news and announcements from the official website of development affairs, and legal frameworks and provisions at different levels (local, state/ region and union levels). The secondary sources were selected based on their reliability, and relevance to the study's aims and research questions.

Coding and Analysis

During the coding and analysis process, the data collected from secondary sources were carefully examined. Initially, open coding was conducted, and subsequently, the themes were developed by categorizing, reviewing, and revising the codes. Finally, the identified themes were interpreted to address the research questions.

CHAPTER 5

Findings

5.1 Examining the formulation and implementation of town hall meetings in a specific local area: What are the reasons behind it?

This study aims to examine the reasons why town hall meetings can be formulated and implemented in a specific local area and the way how those meetings can be conducted. To understand the reasons why town hall meetings can be formulated and implemented, the study examines the legal status, regulations, and dynamic changes of development affairs organizations throughout history, and the institutional approach was applied to demonstrate them.

When it comes to examining the institutions and legal frameworks of municipal administration, it was found that the historical process of development affairs and municipal sector evolution in Myanmar can be traced back to the colonial period. The legal provisions of the municipality in the current era are firstly rooted in British Burma Municipal Act in 1874, updated in 1884. In 1874, the British colony introduced urban governance and administration in Myanmar. In the pre-colonial era in Myanmar, municipal administration was not differentiated from the general administration granted by the monarch. With the 1874 British Burma Municipal Act, the municipal committees were formed in six residential areas, and committee members were assigned power to administer collecting tax, issuing licensing processes, and implementing basic infrastructures. In 1884, the municipal administration was extended to other residential areas as British rule was widely affected. These two laws covered the lower part of the country; therefore, when the British colonization extended to the Upper part of the country, the Upper Myanmar Municipal Law was enacted in 1887. After that, a new Municipal Law was enacted in 1898, covering the whole country, although there were not too many differences with the previous laws. Some new categories of authority and obligations were added – responsibilities to provide street lights and collect service fees,

issue birth, marriage, and death certificates, and maintain roads, drainage, and sanitation system, then their own police. Current development affairs organizations' basic functions and practices have been remarkably consistent and very similar to the legal provision provided by the 1898 Municipal Law, from the power to tax to a range of giving municipal services. However, the 1898 law was repealed entirely in 1993 (Arnold et al., 2015).

In 1953, the enactment of the Democracy Local Administration Act happened because of the intention to replace the British colonial administration after gaining independence (Arnold et al., 2015) and also to promote public participation and make changes in the public representation at township and district levels (United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), 2013). When the military takeover was in 1962, the 1953 Act was repealed despite maintaining the 1898 Municipal law. In 1972 and 1974, the military ruling council/ party made some structural changes and moved the municipal governance under the General Administration Department, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Religious Affairs (Arnold et al., 2015). What is distinctive about the changes in municipal laws under military rule is that weakening the citizens' participation and no representation to the public is exported by the authoritarian institutions. As to the new institutionalism, the values and procedures embedded in the political institutions by the military junta oppress the public representation and electoral system of choosing committee members. The municipal committee members were reported to the Ministry of Home Affairs, strongly military-background institutions.

After the military coup again in 1988, the 1993 Development Committees Law was adopted. It made some structural changes, like moving the development committees under the newly created Department of Development Affairs under the Ministry of Border Affairs (Development Committees Law, 1993). The public officials in the Department of Development Affairs, and the Ministry of Border Affairs, were appointed members having military backgrounds. The cases of corruption – having chances to make in issuing business licensing and tenders were notorious in the municipal sector. In 2008, the new constitution was adopted, and political reform processes were initiated by a newly quasi-civilian government (formed with the military generals) starting in 2011

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ahead. The Department of development affairs under the Ministry of Border Affairs was moved to under the control of state/ regional government bodies. In 2011, DAOs were the only government agencies authorized by State and Regional governments according to Schedule Two of the 2008 Constitution (*Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar*, 2008).

As to the new legal provisions by the 2008 Constitutions, the parliaments (Hluttaws) of states and regions enacted the development affairs laws respectively for their own boundaries around 2012 and 2013 (Myanmar Law Information System, n.d.-a). Although political and institutional reforms were undertaken and local governance systems were developed countrywide, the development affairs laws passed by specific state/ regional parliaments were very similar to the 1993 Development Committees Law adopted under the military regime. The country governing system itself was quasi-civilian, reformed from the military generals, and "Union-level authorities remain firmly in control of most government appointments and governance processes in what is a highly centralized system" (Arnold et al., 2015, p.1).

The government officials and cabinet bodies at state/ regional levels were appointed members. DAOs were also under the state/ regional ministers of development of affairs, who were one of nine ministers in the cabinet body for each state and regional government (Arnold et al., 2015). At the township level, township development affairs committees (TDAC) were involved – most committee members were elected. The influence of public officials on the side of DAOs was hardly influenced by the elected committee members on the side of TDACs, and the authority and obligations of TDACs were not implicitly stated in the legal provisions. According to the institutional nature and structures of development affairs organizations, it can also be assumed that these agencies were not used for the functions like public engagement, transparency, and accountability.

Township elder	Elected	Chairperson
DAO executive officer	Appointed	Secretary
Township elder	Elected	Member
Business sector representative	Elected	Member
Social sector representative	Elected	Member
GAD Deputy Township Officer	Appointed	Member
DRD Deputy Township Officer	Appointed	Member

Fig: 5.1 The Composition of Township Development Affairs Committee

Source: Arnold, Kempel, Ye Thu Aung, and Kyi Pyar Chit Saw (2015)

In 2015, the civilian government took office after November general election and formed government bodies with elected members. Subsequently, the reform programs were processed, and each state and regional government amended the development affairs laws to modify the authority of TDACs and other functions from 2018 to 2020. The development affairs organizations are under the control of respective state/ regional governments; hence, each state/ region has its own development affairs law and policies. In Sagaing Region (the specific local area where town hall meetings happened), the previous development affairs law (passed in 2012) was amended on October 4, 2018, and gave the authority to TDACs to oversight the DAO office (Sagaing Region Development Affairs Law, 2018).

The TDAC members elected from the public played a supportive role in gaining public relations with the DAO office, and transparency and accountability were more assured in the budgeting process and issuing the licensing process. Lack of public trust in development affairs organizations was promoted by making sure to meet the public needs in implementing the projects. Until the military coup in 2021, the role of the committees was critical to have a significant impact on the reforming process. After the coup on February 2021, the sections mentioning the obligations of the committees were repealed in the respective state/ regional development affairs laws (Myanmar Law Information System, n.d.-b).

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By seeing these dynamic changes in development affairs organizations and legal status development from the colonial era to the present, it was contextualized to understand the reasons why the town hall meetings can be formulated and implemented in the Sagaing region. It was found that the organizational nature and the institutions were still sticking to the practices under the military rule in the initial period of the reform process (2011-2015) and it was difficult to deal with the process of public engagement, transparency, and accountability. The regime itself was a quasi-civilian government. After 2015 under the civilian government, the reform process became quicker and it was evident that the laws were amended and achieved to be more transparent and accountable. It was also ensuring to meet the public needs by granting the authority to TDAC (4 out of 7 committee members were elected).
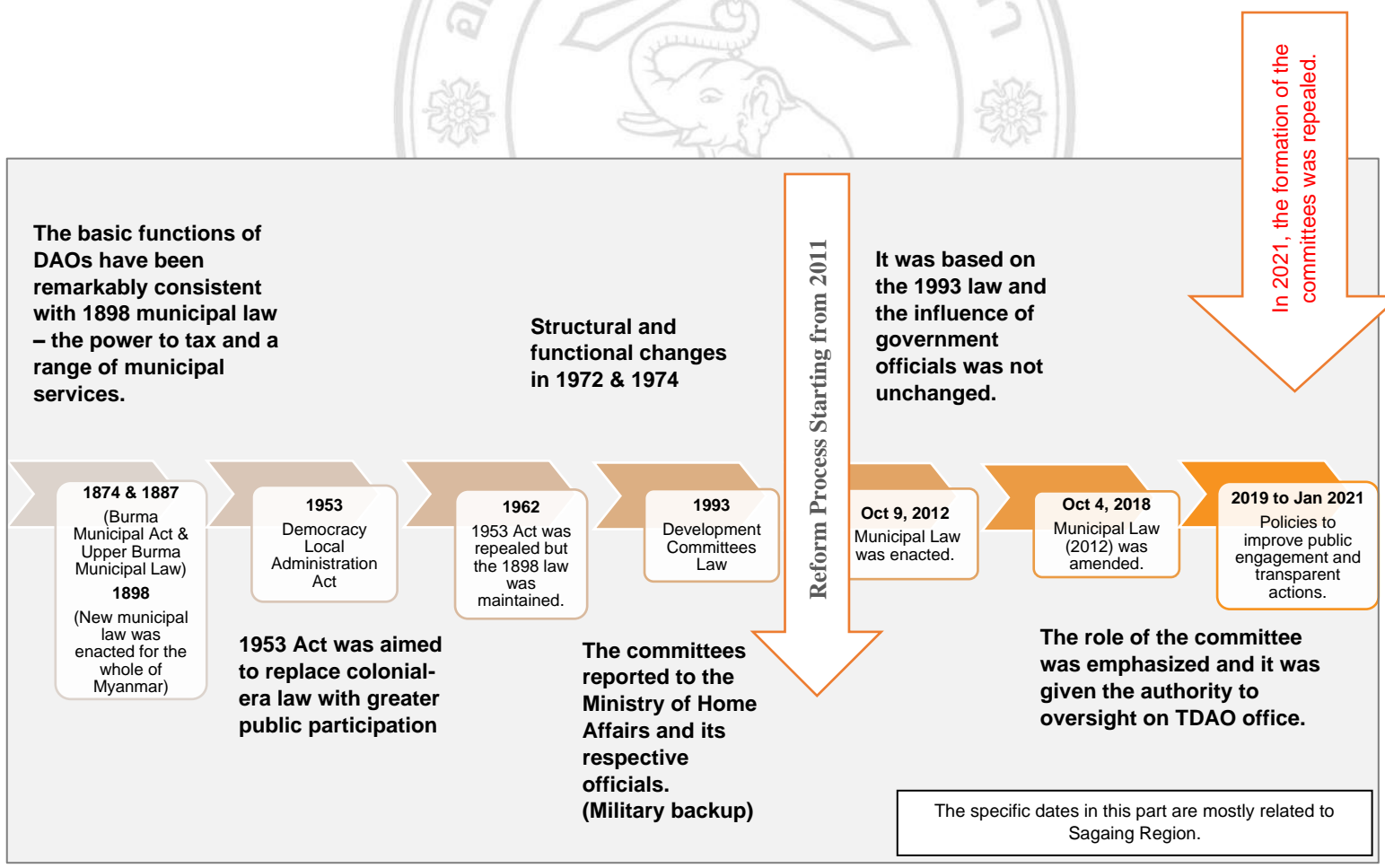
Fig: 5.2 Evolution of Development Affairs Organizations

Source: Author's elaboration

5.2 Examining the formulation and implementation of town hall meetings in a specific local area: How are they conducted?

In this section, the study continues to examine how town hall meetings can be conducted in Sagaing Region. To explain how they can be formulated and implemented, the political environment, the emerging problems, and the policy proposals in this specific period are analyzed, and Kingdom's multiple streams framework (MSF) was employed.

The specific local area where town hall meetings can be implemented in this study is the Sagaing Region, Myanmar, and its respective township areas within the Sagaing Region boundary (township-level implementation and state/ regional level of administration). Sagaing Region is located in the northwest part of Myanmar, covering the country's upper portion and central dry zone, as shown in Figure. It is geographically the second largest region, with 94,621 square kilometers wide, forming 37 townships within the region (MIMU, n.d.).
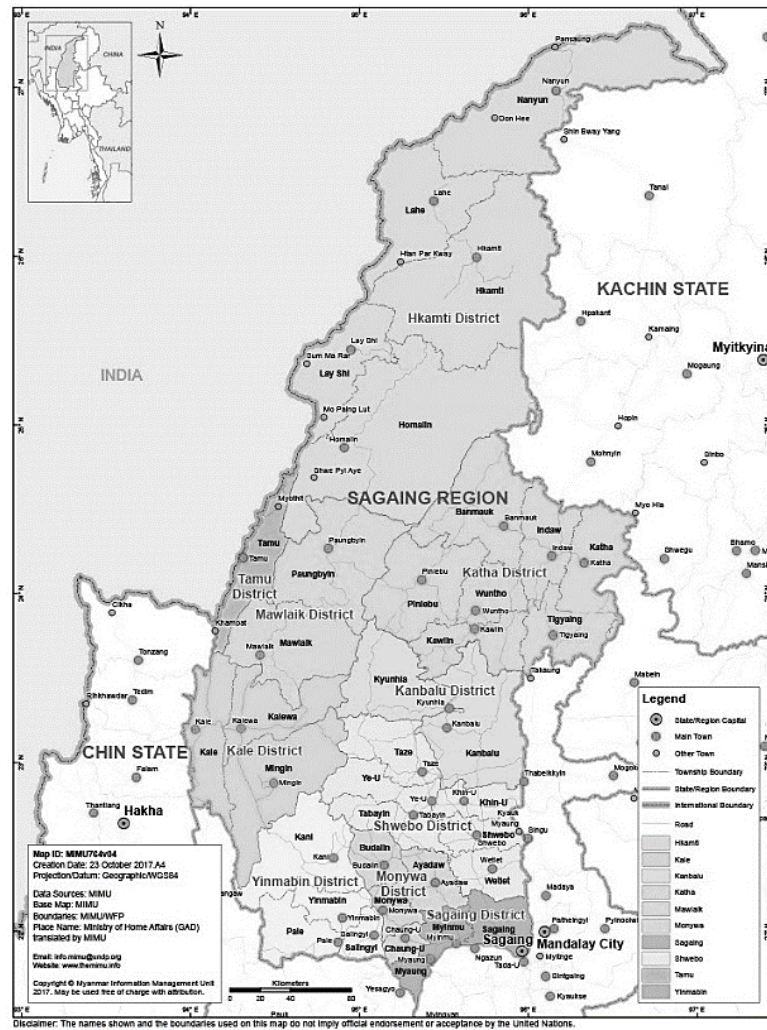
Fig: 5.3 Sagaing Region Map

Source: MIMU (n.d.)

Around 2017 and 2018 under the newly elected civilian government, the political environment supported the reforms – reform programs had been initiated in each sector and given priority to listen to the public voice and to have a strong representation of the public in political institutions. In the way to implementing the peace process and going forwards to the federal state, urban areas were considered to support economic development and peace (Batcheler et al., 2018).

During this reform process, there were so many issues and problems to address because this period was when development affairs were struggling to tackle almost all the absence of the military regime. The problems that need attention for development

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affairs organizations are improving social services, revenue collection, and management, enhancing public engagement, and so on (Arnold et al., 2015). Therefore, on the other hand, the policy entrepreneurs like non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and other interest group lobbyists have been waiting to handle these problems in the wing of the policy channel. As stated in Zahariadis's argument, "The closer they are to policymakers, the more successful they are likely to be" (Zahariadis, 2007, as cited in Deschaux-Dutard, 2020, p.64), a civil society organization that had exposure to the development affairs organizations and requested to support the capacity building gained a chance to provide policy solutions concerned with the public engagement problem, especially to conduct town hall meetings. I encountered this notable issue while working at a civil society organization.

According to Kingdom expression, "the problems are not self-evident, and they need a little push to call attention to the problem" (Deschaux-Dutard, 2020); the civil society organization had communicated with Sagaing Region Parliament, and they were giving the training to empower members of parliament to have better representation to the public. At that time, the project of "Citizen Engagement of Sagaing Region Hluttaw" with the public was advocated and implemented. While working at this organization, I observed that the impact of the project had influenced the development affairs sector, and this had been used to rapidly push forward initiatives on public engagement policy of conducting town hall meetings in respective townships by DAOs.

As Kingdon puts it, the policy entrepreneurs (the civil society organization) managed to 'strike when the iron was hot.' The key intention of this civil society organization was that public engagement is critical in every democratic country. They believed that the involvement of the public could increase the democratic process and develop democratic cultures. On the one hand, improvements in public engagement will result in greater satisfaction with municipal services, and next, it will contribute to improving tax revenue and encouraging transparency of the DAOs (Pyae Sone Aung, 2019).

Last, but not least, I observed that it is inevitable to ignore the will of the DAO executive director of the Sagaing Region. The three streams were coupled relying on the

favorable political climate and actions/ solutions provided by policy entrepreneurs, but it is suggested that the policy formulation of conducting town hall meetings was impossible without the cooperation of Sagaing Region DAO executive and also the township-level DAOs to implement meetings in respective townships.

Finally, the public engagement policy of conducting town hall meetings was developed and formulated by Sagaing Region Development Affairs Organization in 2019 (Pyae Sone Aung, 2019). After the policy output, consequently, town hall meetings can be implemented in two-thirds of the total 37 townships around 2019 and 2020 (*Sagaing Region Development Affairs Organization*, n.d.), before the pandemic and the military coup. Such kind of policy and conducting town hall meetings can be expanded to other areas – Magway Region and Mandalay Region.

Thus, the importance of the political climate at this period, the engagement of policy entrepreneurs, and the cooperation of DAOs, all those factors explain how town hall meetings can be formulated and implemented as part of a broader public engagement policy in the Sagaing Region.

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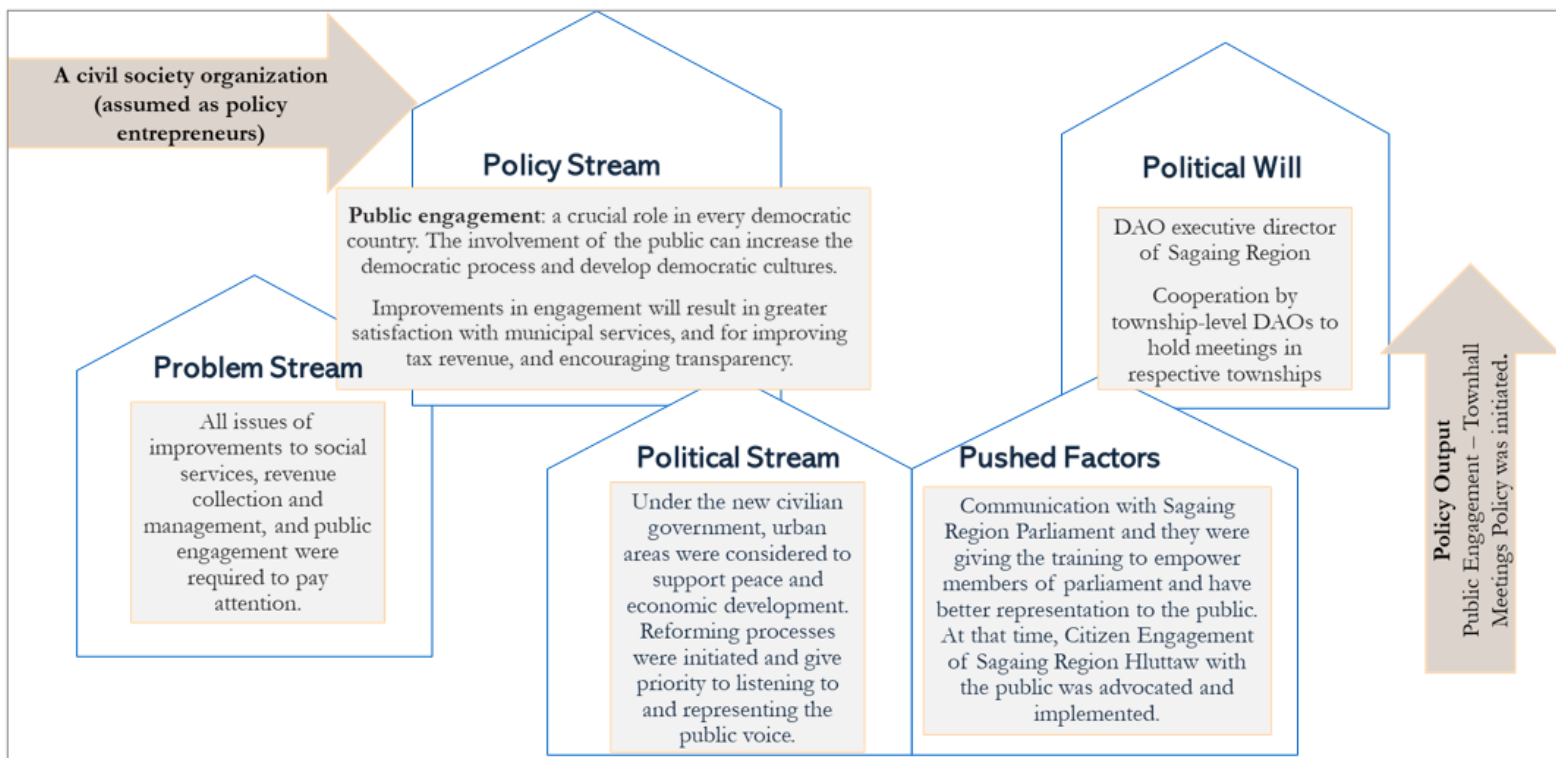
Fig: 5.4 Policy Analysis through the Lens of MSF

Source: Author's elaboration

5.3 Supporting and inhibiting factors for promoting town hall meetings in the future

In this section, the study identifies the driving forces of the past and present to o address the second research question of the paper – what are the supporting and inhibiting factors for promoting Town Hall meetings, the Futures Triangle approach is employed. Taking into account the findings of the first research question, the existing push and weight within the municipal sector are analyzed and presented below. These findings are critical to consider when moving forward with the implementation of "Conducting Town Hall Meetings" in other local areas or throughout the country in the future.

In analyzing the current drivers and trends that influence and shape the future, the existing development affairs laws and provisions enacted in each and every state/ region are the first push factor supporting the promotion of town hall meetings in the future. As to the new legal provisions by the 2008 Constitutions, the parliaments (Hluttaws) of states and regions enacted the development affairs laws respectively for their own

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boundaries around 2012 and 2013. In 2015, under the civilian government, the reform programs were processed, and each state and regional government made amendments to the development affairs laws to modify the authority of TDACs and other functions from 2018 to 2020 (Myanmar Law Information System, n.d.-a). Specific development affairs laws and policies allow each state or region to exercise autonomy and make decisions that align with their unique needs and priorities. As new challenges or opportunities arise, TDAOs can amend or update their policies to address emerging issues and align with evolving national or regional priorities.

Secondly, as to the political protocol, DAOs are under the full control of state/ regional governments, whereas other departments are accountable to the union-level government bodies. Under Schedule Two of the 2008 Constitution and subsequent reforms, DAOs are under the total control of state/ regional governments (Winter & Mya Nandar Thin, 2016). DAOs at the township level were recognized as the only fully decentralized government agencies because they are unique in some way like they are fully self-funded and generally use their revenues in the township where they were collected, and they have significant discretion over revenue use (Arnold et al., 2015). This autonomy enables TDAOs to find their own solution and make quicker decisions in implementing new activities and strategies, considering local resources, cultural considerations, and developmental challenges.

In addition, the policy initiation of implementing town hall meetings in the Sagaing Region could serve as a model for other regions, such as Magway Region and Mandalay Region, to adopt similar public engagement policies and practices. It plays a crucial role in promoting town hall meetings as an effective mechanism for citizen engagement and participatory governance in the future. This initiative can contribute to demonstration effect, awareness and knowledge sharing, capacity building efforts, collaboration and networking, and positive public perception and create a supportive environment for the wider promotion and adoption of town hall meetings in other areas. Moreover, improving responsiveness to Development Affairs Organizations or Municipality (DAO) to public needs and using social media to expand public engagement

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(Roberts, 2018) is another supporting factor in engaging with the public and implementing town hall meetings in the future.

Furthermore, Sustainable Development Goal (SGD) 16, which focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development (United Nations, n.d.), is a push factor shaping the preferred future. It aligns with the principles and objectives of town hall meetings, making them effective mechanisms for citizen participation and inclusive governance. By promoting good governance, participatory decision-making, access to justice and information, peaceful conflict resolution, and the empowerment of marginalized groups, SDG Goal 16 supports the more comprehensive promotion and adoption of town hall meetings as crucial tools for achieving sustainable and inclusive development.

To elaborate on the inhibiting factors that weigh achieving the preferred future of implementing town hall meetings countrywide, the first inhibiting factor is the historical legacy of weakness in public engagement. As previously mentioned above, what is distinctive about the changes in municipal laws under military rule is that weakening the citizens' participation and no representation to the public is exported by the authoritarian institutions. As to the new institutionalism, the values and procedures embedded in the political institutions by the military junta oppress the public representation and electoral system of choosing committee members. The municipal committee members were reported to the Ministry of Home Affairs, strongly military-background institutions. This will be a significant barrier in promoting town hall meetings.

Consequently, when working directly with the TDAOs, I observed that the willingness of individual officials served as crucial in implementing town hall meetings in Sagaing Region. Thus, the will of the officials in the respective township area can affect achieving the goal – it may vary depending on the different township areas. The military coup is another major inhibiting factor that posts the barriers shaping the preferred future. It disrupted the reform process in public administration and caused political instability. After the coup on February 2021, the sections mentioning the obligations of the committees were repealed in the respective state/ regional development affairs laws (Myanmar Law Information System, n.d.-b). Before the coup, the

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committees played a supportive role in gaining public relations with the DAO office, and transparency and accountability were more assured in the budgeting process and issuing the licensing process. As a result of the coup, international, local NGOs and other civil society organizations also stopped their projects and ended their engagement with public officials. These factors address the weight of the past that deters to promoting town hall meetings in other areas or countrywide in the future.

Town hall meetings in other local areas or throughout the country

- Development Affairs Laws
- The most decentralized government agencies
- Successfully-conducted town hall meetings as a good initiative
- Improved responsiveness
- SGD Goal 16

Pull of the future

Plausible Future

Push of the present

Weight of the past

- Weak public engagement
- Willingness of officials
- Military coup
- Halt of support from international and other organizations
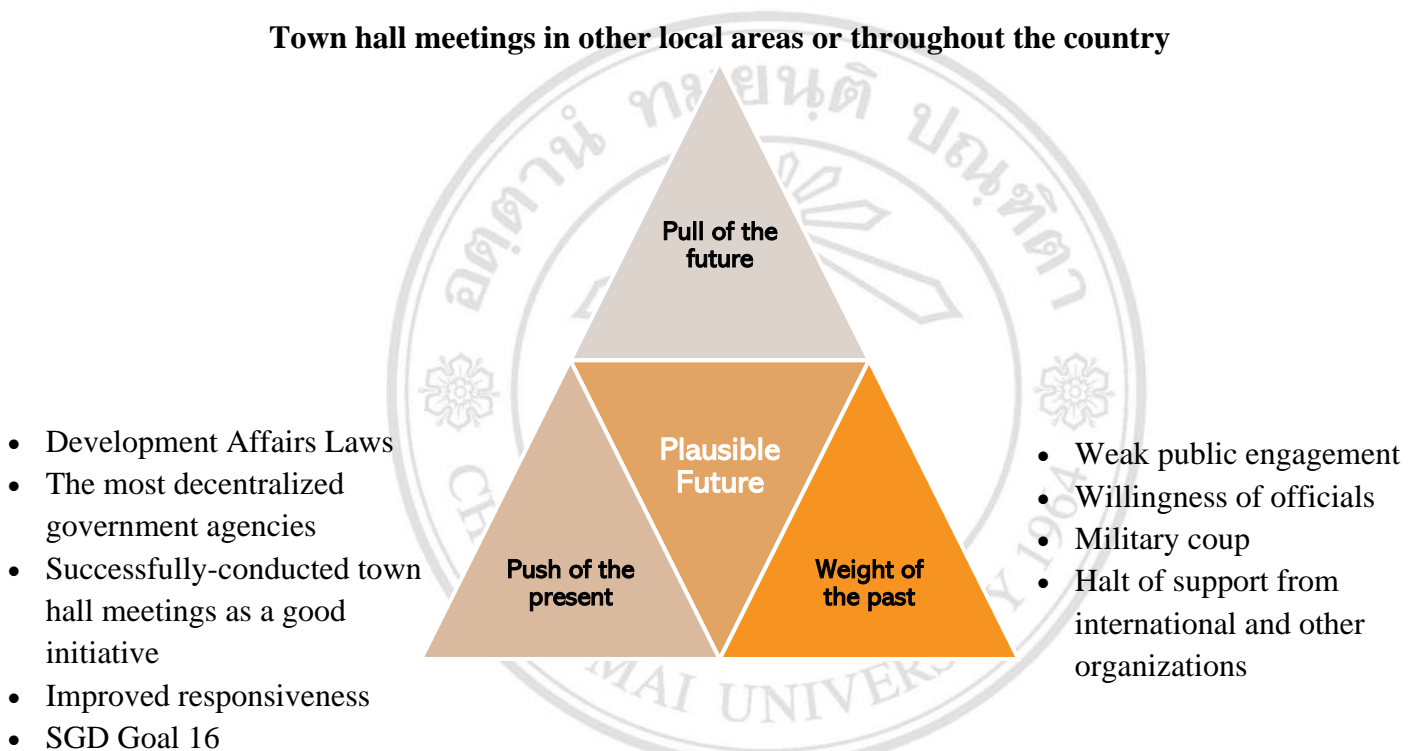
Fig: 5.5 Policy Analysis through the Lens of Futures Triangle

Source: Author's elaboration

CHAPTER 6

Policy Recommendation

Based on the analysis of two research questions, the study findings have provided critical insights into the evolution of development affairs organizations (DAOs) concerning their legal frameworks and values and practice embedded in the institutions. Additionally, the coupling factors such as the reformed political environment, issues of enhancing public participation and engagement, and the role of policy entrepreneurs and DAOs officials have been identified. Furthermore, supporting and inhibiting factors, such as development affairs laws, political autonomy, successful previous implementations in Sagaing region, improving responsiveness and alignment with sustainable development goals, the historical legacy of weak public engagement, the individual will of officials, and the impact of the military coup in the place of promoting town hall meetings, have been highlighted.

These findings were instrumental in shaping policy recommendations through the Backcasting approach, which helps to work backward from a desired future state to identify the necessary steps and actions needed to achieve that future. The implications of the research findings on the development of DAO and previous successful formulation and implementation of town hall meetings in the Sagaing region, as well as the push and pull factors of the existing situation, were considered to formulate policy recommendations for promoting town hall meetings nationwide in the future. Through Backcasting approach, it is envisioned a future in 2030 where town hall meetings are widely implemented throughout the country, fostering public engagement, transparency, and participatory governance.

To achieve this desired future, the following strategies and policy recommendations were developed:

1. Restoring Political Stability and Enabling Democratic Reforms (to be achieved by 2015): Given the disruptions caused by the military coup, it is crucial to

restore political stability and create an enabling environment for democratic reforms aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). All stakeholders must collaborate to expedite this process and encourage the re-engagement of international and local NGOs and civil society organizations to support public participation initiatives and reform processes.

2. Reviewing and Updating Development Affairs Laws and Provisions (from 2026 to 2027): It is essential to review and update existing development affairs laws and provisions to align them with current needs, priorities, and democratic practices. Revising provisions, that have removed committees comprising elected members, aiming to support democratic engagement and participation, granting more decision-making authority, and strengthening DAOs' autonomy will lay a strong legal foundation for implementing town hall meetings and other participatory mechanisms.

3. Leveraging Successful Implementations from Sagaing Region (from 2027 to 2028): Learnings from successful town hall meeting implementations in Sagaing Region should be shared as models for other regions to adopt. Regular sharing sessions, workshops, and knowledge-sharing platforms should be established for DAOs and stakeholders involved in public engagement initiatives. Additionally, specialized training and capacity-building programs for officials at all levels should emphasize the importance of public engagement and participatory governance. Continuous efforts to encourage public engagement, improve responsiveness, and disseminate information through various communication platforms will ensure wider coverage of town hall meetings and their outcomes.

4. Developing Comprehensive Policy Framework and Implementation Plans (from 2028 to 2029): A multi-stakeholder working group should be convened to develop guidelines, manuals, and a comprehensive policy framework for the nationwide implementation of town hall meetings. Pilot initiatives should be carried out in selected areas with clear implementation plans, resources, and

support mechanisms. Regular evaluation and monitoring of the pilot initiatives will help identify successes, challenges, and areas for improvement.

5. Realizing the Vision of Promoting Town Hall Meetings (in 2030): By following these strategies and implementing the recommended policies, the goal of promoting town hall meetings throughout the country can be realized.
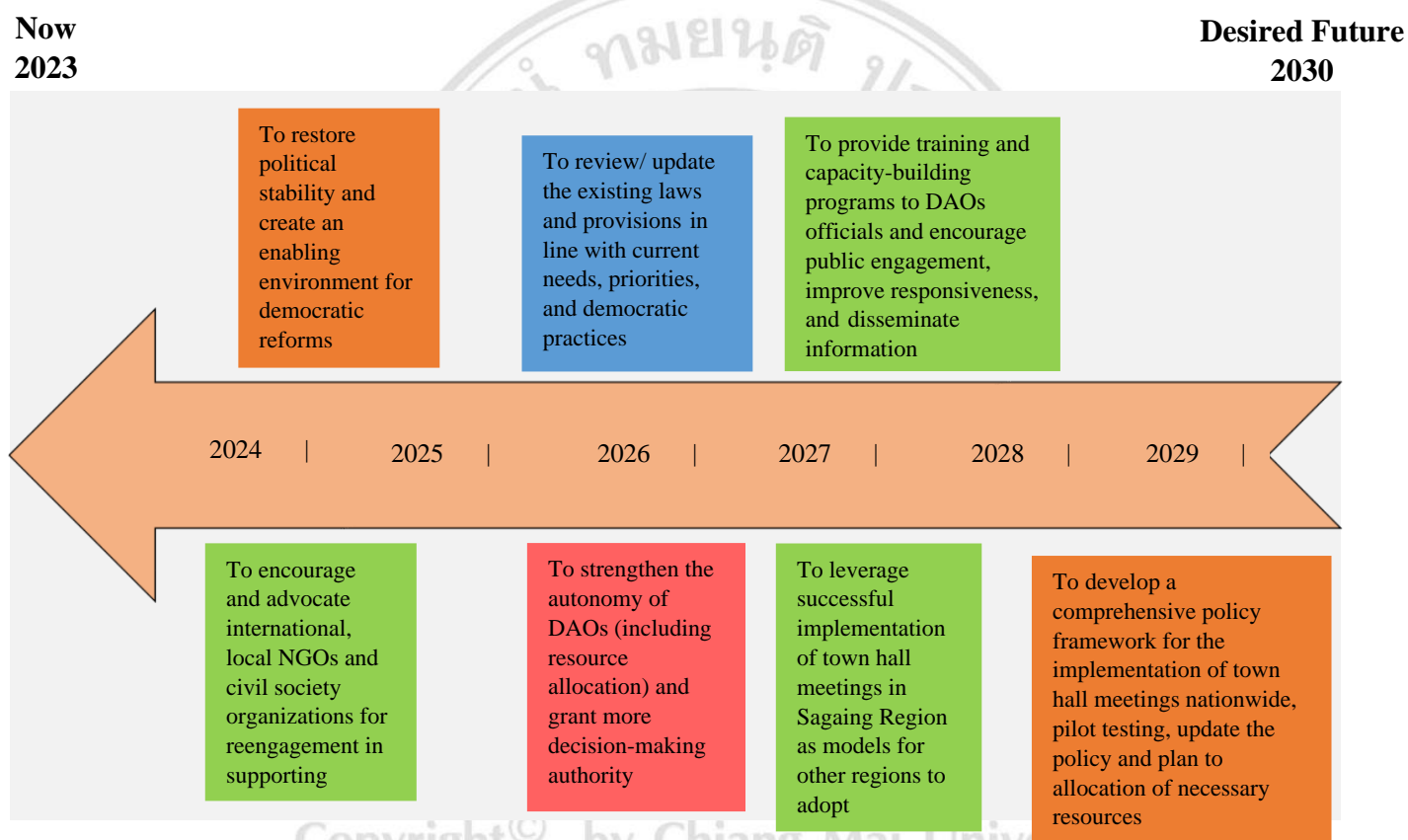

Fig: 6.1 Backcasting: Future of Town Hall Meetings throughout the country

Source: Author's elaboration

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

The study examines the implementation of town hall meetings in a specific area and identifies the supporting and weighting factors to expand town hall meetings throughout the country in the future. It is supposed that both the two approaches of institutions and multiple streams frameworks (MSF) provide a comprehensive understanding of the institutional nature of the development affairs organizations, their origins and history in Myanmar, and elaboration on how town hall meetings can be implemented, either.

Through the institutional lens, not only the formal status and legislatures but also the values and practices embedded in the institutions can be seen in the development affairs sector in Myanmar. On the other hand, the lens of MSF could explain the political climate in that situation and governing system. MSF highlights the willingness of stakeholders to make reforms and how town hall meetings happen. From the perspectives of policy entrepreneurs, it can conclude how they interacted to legitimate the policy solutions they promoted.

The futures triangle, furthermore, could illustrate push, pull, and weight factors to map the plausible future of promoting town hall meetings throughout the country. The futures triangle approach makes it clear what are the driving forces at present and in the past to move forward in the preferred future. Considering the historical context, institutional dynamics, and the prevailing push and weight factors in the municipal sector, the Backcasting approach offers valuable insights and proposes actions to be undertaken over the next seven years.

It is, however, important to note that the study lacks the inclusion of perspectives from experts, civil society organizations, and the public. This represents a notable gap that future scholars can address, and their involvement in further analysis would significantly contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. By

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incorporating primary inputs from these stakeholders, the subsequent analysis can benefit from a broader range of perspectives and enhance the overall quality of research in this area.

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