Case Study on Advocacy, Influence and Political Participation in the Philippines

The Asia Foundation
Global Women in Politics

Supported by The United States Agency for International Development
Case Study on Advocacy, Influence and Political Participation
Constituency-Building and Electoral Advocacy with Grassroots Women in the Philippines

This case study was an initiative of The Asia Foundation’s Global Women in Politics Program (GWIP), a four-year multi-regional program supported by the United States Agency for International Development. It contributes to and enriches the Foundation’s decade-long commitment to and experience in promoting women’s effective political participation.

GWIP’s “Advocacy Initiative” was developed in to the widespread demand by activists and women in elected office for skills, tools, strategies and concepts to enable them to influence public decisionmaking. It was designed as a learning and action strategy, combining regional training of trainers with follow-up support for action strategies and case studies. The Advocacy Initiative became an opportunity for activists, advocates and trainers to share their training tools and practical experiences with the aim of generating new and improved knowledge, skills and tools.

This is one of a series of case studies written by GWIP partners that contribute to knowledge and learning from practice. They are produced for practitioners and researchers interested in understanding and engaging in advocacy.

This case study from the Philippines is primarily a description of how a national federation mobilizes its membership to advocate at different levels. The rich experience of DSWP provides multiple lessons about organizing the power of numbers. In this sense, the study responds to a number of burning questions expressed by activists and advocates worldwide, concretely: 1) how grassroots members are incorporated into and ultimately drive the advocacy agenda; 2) how decisions are made at the community level and in the organization so that the process is empowering and owned by the members; and 3) how women and other disadvantaged groups have created alternative forms of political strategy and organization -- including new political parties -- in order to engage in politics and at the same time, transform political culture.

The Asia Foundation thanks Elizabeth Cunanan-Angsioco (and Eva Cayanan, DSWP trainer), for sharing their insights and experience in this case study, Valerie Miller and Debbie Budlender for their revisions and edits, and the U.S Agency for International Development for its support. Lisa VeneKlasen, Assistant Director of GWIP, designed and directed the Advocacy Initiative.
CONSTITUENCY-BUILDING AND ELECTORAL ADVOCACY WITH GRASSROOTS WOMEN IN THE PHILIPPINES

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A Case Study Written for
The Global Women In Politics Program
The Asia Foundation
Washington, DC

March 2000
CONSTITUENCY-BUILDING AND ELECTORAL ADVOCACY
WITH GRASSROOTS WOMEN

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Introduction

This case study describes how the membership federation of the Democratic Socialist Women of the Philippines (DSWP) has used advocacy to organize and advance the interests of grassroots women within the political arena. The advocacy experiences in this story range from local level denouncements in cases of domestic violence to legislative reform to electoral organizing to establish a women’s political party and field women candidates for the Party List Law in 1998. While much of DSWP’s organizing and advocacy experience focuses on women, their strategies, principles, experiences, and lessons have much to offer others interested in advocacy and citizen participation.

About DSWP

Founded in 1987, the DSWP is a national federation of grassroots and community-based women’s organizations scattered across nine regions of the Philippines. There are 98 accredited chapters, some of which are themselves provincial federations of women’s groups. DSWP’s members are drawn from the marginalized communities of Philippine society – peasants, workers in the formal and informal sectors, youth, urban poor, fisherfolks, indigenous peoples and Muslims. The DSWP’s objectives are:

- To fight against all forms of discrimination against women;
- To promote a form of development that recognizes the role that women can and do play;
- To raise women’s level of consciousness, self-confidence and economic independence;
- To increase women’s participation in all levels of decision-making; and
- To work together with other women’s and mixed organizations to promote common goals and objectives.

To understand DSWP’s advocacy experience, it is important to know two of the basic principles that guide the federation.

Organizing Principles

All issues are women’s issues.

DSWP believes that all issues are women’s issues, because all problems have an impact on women. Often, the impact is heavier and more negative for women than men. In practice, this means that gender and other factors of disadvantage must be addressed simultaneously. As a peasant woman observed:

“What will I gain if I am equal to my husband when he is put down by society because we’re peasants?”

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1 Revised from a case study written by Elizabeth Cunanan-Angsioco, National Chairperson, Democratic Socialist Women of the Philippines; adapted and edited by Debbie Budlender and Lisa VeneKlasen.

2 DSWP sent Eva Cayanan to participate in the GWIP Advocacy Training of Trainers for the Asia Pacific in September 1997.
And what would I gain if peasants’ issues are solved and I remain inferior in my personal relationships?”

Problems such as violence against women (VAW), women’s lack of participation in decision-making, economic marginalization, and poor sexual and reproductive health are often considered “women’s” problems. In reality, these issues affect everyone in society. In practice, it is important for women’s voices to be encouraged and heard in mapping solutions to problems and the development of strategies.

The personal is political.

Politics is not only about a country’s governance. Politics is the use of power to make decisions. This power exists at all levels of a person’s life, including in personal relationships. To achieve gender equality, change must reach into women’s personal lives. A woman should be able to determine her direction based on her available options – not on society’s or men’s terms. Enacting gender sensitive laws will only make a difference when there is a difference in women’s personal lives.

One important negative aspect of the personal realm is the way that roles and tasks are divided between women and men. In general, women are expected to bear the burden of unpaid labor in the household – cooking, cleaning and looking after others. At worst, this burden confines the woman in her family and home, while she toils for long hours without being valued and recognized by society. At best, she engages in paid work but must also do the unpaid work at home. Often her paid work mirrors the type of work she does in the home and is poorly compensated. From DSWP’s perspective, all work -- whether inside or outside the home -- must be valued and recognized by society.

DSWP’s Programs

DSWP’s programs take shape around the “Women’s Agenda” which was developed through provincial consultations with its members. The Agenda outlines concerns and issues faced by a broad range of Filipino women, and highlights strategies and actions for addressing these issues. The Agenda covers the need for more gender-sensitive or pro-women laws and policies as well as the improved implementation of existing ones on issues such as poverty, VAW, women’s health, reproductive rights, and women’s political participation. The Agenda also calls for the amendment or repeal of existing legislation and policies which negatively affect Filipino women.

DSWP has four main programs: The Organizing Program (TOP), The Technical Assistance Program (TAP), The Education and Training Program (ETP), and The Advocacy and Networking Program (A&N). They often overlap and interconnect for maximum impact. For instance, the DSWP’s work on women’s political participation is most effective when it involves organizing, education, technical assistance, networking and advocacy. Activities and programs are carried out at all levels - local, provincial, national and international.

Project ideas always come from community and grassroots women themselves – the federation acts as facilitator. DSWP does not see the need to “prescribe” to women the solutions to their problems. Women are not seen as “beneficiaries”, but as active players. Project implementation also relies heavily on participation from the federation’s chapters.

The Organizing Program (TOP)

DSWP’s ongoing “organizing program” is critical to its overall strategy, because of the importance of women’s collective action and voice in addressing issues, and their reliance on the power of numbers as a source of clout. DSWP organizes women into autonomous groupings of mixed people’s, sector-based or non-government organizations (NGOs), in recognition of women’s diverse contexts and ways of organizing.

The debate as to whether women should work with the mainstream or “mixed” organizations, or take action only as separate women’s groups is not useful. In fact, both approaches can be used simultaneously. The important thing is that women are able to express their collective will and interests.
At present, DSWP is focusing on organizing community and grassroots-based young women. The DSWP recognizes that the current women’s movement draws most of its leadership and membership from among middle-class and middle-aged women. Consequently, very few women’s groups address young women’s issues.

To build organizations, the federation uses a range of participatory and popular methodologies, tactics and techniques aimed at maximizing grassroots women’s participation.

**The Technical Assistance Program (TAP)**

DSWP provides continuous technical assistance to its chapter organizations in the following areas:

- conceptualizing and developing local projects;
- accessing resources and implementing projects;
- training in Basic Book Keeping and Financial Management, Project Proposal Writing, Basic Entrepreneurship, Organizational Management, Speakers, Trainers, and Leadership; and
- sharing of information through the production and distribution of relevant reading materials.

Within TAP, DSWP implements projects that are geared toward helping member’s address economic and survival needs. Some examples of these livelihood projects are:

- Livelihood Revolving Fund for Women (LRFW) for members in Luzon;
- a rice trading project for chapters in Guimaras in Western Visayas;
- a fish culture project for chapters within the seven lakes of San Pablo City in Laguna;
- a micro-credit project for chapters in Marawi City (Muslim women); and
- a small garments factory for Bataan chapters.

While these livelihood projects may be considered traditional women’s work, each includes education activities which challenge the status quo. Further, all projects use creative approaches that allow the grassroots women who participate to make all of the key decisions and to gain exposure to the more “technical” activities like transacting with banks, keeping and maintaining financial records, maintaining checking accounts, etc. These are activities that may be routinely handled by “schooled” and middle-class women, but are challenging to poor women, who often would not enter a bank, much less negotiate with it.

**The Education and Training Program (ETP)**

Many education activities are integrated into other programs. Modules are clustered as follows:

- Consciousness-raising and Orientation;
- Capability Building;
- Education on Social Issues;

The latter includes topics such as the Expanded Value Added Tax (E-VAT); foreign debt and women; legislative proposals on and for women; child labor; women in the informal economic sector; contract work; migration; poverty and women; women and machismo in government.

DSWP’s ETP uses popular education methodologies and are rich with structured learning exercises, games, visuals, and group work to stimulate interaction and cooperation among the participants. Activities, materials and methodologies are adapted to suit the specific needs of target participants. Besides seminars, the DSWP has used forums, conferences, consultations, informance (information/performance), focus group discussions, study circles and local women’s meetings. The ETP is implemented by DSWP’s Education Commission which draws upon member organizations, leadership and staff.
The Advocacy and Networking Program (A & N)

The federation is actively involved in several coalitions, alliances and networks. These include gender-specific, sectoral, economic and political groupings, such as:

Women’s networks:

**SIBOL (Sama-Samang Inisyatiba ng Kababaihan sa Pagbabago ng Batas at Lipunan)** brings together eleven women’s NGOs, mass-based organizations, and institutions involved in legislative and policy advocacy for women. It is the country’s leading women’s lobby group and spearheaded the work for the enactment of the new Anti-Rape law. DSWP is a member of SIBOL’s Steering Committee and the federation chairs the Working Group on Economic and Political Issues.

**Network Against Violence Against Filipino Migrants (NOVA)** is a network of fifteen women’s organizations and mixed NGOs involved in advocacy on migration and its feminization. One of NOVA’s primary activities is lobbying for laws protecting women migrant workers.

**Kilos Kabaro! (KK)** is a network of more than thirty women’s organizations and NGOs involved in the twin issues of VAW and poverty. KK is the Philippine network of the World March of Women 2000, an international network of women’s groups on the same issues. The DSWP serves as KK’s co-convenor together with Linangan ng Kababaihan (LIKHAAN).

**Reproductive Rights Resource Group (RRRG)** brings together women’s organizations and individuals engaged in advocacy for women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights. RRRG’s focus at present is the legalization of safe abortion in specific cases.

**Task Force May 28** is a loose network of about 40 women’s organizations and other sectoral and NGOs engaged in advocacy for women’s health in general and reproductive rights in particular.

**Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW)** is an international coalition working against trafficking in women. In the Philippines, the CATW leads in the advocacy for the passage of an anti-trafficking in women bill into law. The coalition is also involved in the issue of prostitution, including advocacy for its decriminalization.

**BABAYI (Babae at Bayan, Isulong!)** is a national alliance of grassroots, community and sector-based women’s organizations involved in political issues in general and women’s political participation in particular. BABAYI was founded by the DSWP but has won the support of other grassroots women’s groups, especially those from rural areas. DSWP serves as BABAYI’s secretariat. BABAYI was accredited by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) as a party list organization which enabled it to run in the 1998 elections. At present, BABAYI conducts fora on political issues and their relevance to women.

Other networks:

**Partido Demokratiko-Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (Phil. Democratic Socialist Party PDSP)** is a partner organization of the DSWP. The two organizations are parallel, separate but related. DSWP is represented in all PDSP structures, including the Steering Committee. This enables the DSWP to influence party processes and decisions while maintaining the autonomy to make its own decisions and implement its own activities. By virtue of the partnership, the DSWP is represented in the Socialist International Women (SIW) which is the biggest international political organization of women. The SIW is composed of social democratic, socialist, democratic socialist and labor organizations’ women leaders.

**KUMARE/KUMPARE (KK)** is a multi-sectoral network engaged in advocacy for electoral reforms. The DSWP is one of the few women’s groups involved in KK.

**Konsyensyang Pilipino (KP)** is a national multi-sectoral network of organizations and individuals. It acts as a “political watchdog” on hot political issues such as cronyism, graft and corruption in government, constitutional
amendments, and press freedom. The DSWP serves on the Executive Committee of KP.

*Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) and FDC Women’s Committee* is a major Philippine NGO network. It draws membership from sectoral, political, academic and women’s organizations nationwide. In addition to foreign debt, the FDC is increasingly engaged in issues relevant to the macro-economic developmental model and related economic policies. An important contribution of the DSWP to the FDC is its advocacy for the whole network to address women’s economic concerns at the macro level. Further, the DSWP initiated the strong lobby for FDC and its Women’s Committee to focus on the government implementation of its budgetary provision for gender-specific initiatives. The DSWP sits as a member organization of FDC and is also involved in its Women’s Committee.

**DSWP Advocacy in Focus**

Advocacy demands a variety of sub-strategies and tactics in order to be effective. Through its many years of engaging in advocacy, DSWP identifies the following main features of its advocacy strategies:

**Advocacy At All Levels**

*Local level advocacy*

A major strength of DSWP is the size of its membership as numbers are an excellent tool for advocacy. Years before the federation’s involvement in national coalitions and networks, DSWP’s local chapters were implementing local advocacy campaigns with technical, and oftentimes logistical, support from the national office.

Examples include advocacy on the rights of women ambulant vendors in Mariveles Bataan’s public market; sexual harassment in workplaces (long before the enactment of the anti-harassment law) and in mixed organizations; individual cases involving women migrant workers; local issues of fisherfolks in Laguna’s seven lakes; corruption involving local government officials; and urban poor issues in Quezon.

Activities employed in local advocacy range from protest rallies, dialogues with local officials, letter barrages, pickets, distribution of flyers and other information, issue forums and other educational activities, filing of cases, local radio and newspaper interviews, and a host of other activities developed by DSWP chapters alone or in cooperation with other local groups and/or the national office.

Overall, cases of violence against women (incest, rape and domestic violence) dominate local advocacy campaigns. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of VAW cases reported by DSWP chapters during the last few years, attributed to enhanced public awareness and a deeper understanding of VAW by women’s organizations. Some of the specific cases handled by the local chapters include:

- The rape of a fifteen year old girl from a poor family in the province of Guimaras who got pregnant and gave birth. The case is ongoing. Although the accused has not been found, the case has brought public attention to the problem of rape in an area that was considered relatively peaceful and violence free.
- Incest against a fifteen year old girl perpetrated by her father, a former policeman in Mariveles, Bataan. During the May 1998 local elections, women’s groups in Mariveles used this case against the mayor who then lost his campaign for higher office.
- The rape of a fourteen year old girl by her father in Buhi, Camarines Sur.
- The battery of a DSWP leader in Bukidnon, who says that the assault is directly related to her involvement in DSWP activities.
- Domestic violence against a DSWP member in Lopez, Quezon perpetrated by her husband. The man has strong connections with the local police.

Although DSWP efforts in many of these cases has not resulted in a satisfactory solution, there has been a significant change in attitudes on women’s issues, and particularly VAW, among the federation’s chapters. It is also noteworthy that those who assist victims/survivors in many instances use their own meager resources.

The activities undertaken related to local advocacy include:
• generating resources generation for the victim/survivor;
• holding planning meetings of DSWP chapters in the area to map out the campaign/s;
• facilitating medical examinations and filing of cases based on the decision of survivor/victim;
• facilitating counseling;
• writing and meeting with the local officials such as Mayors, women elected officials, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and/or the police to pressure them into acting on the case/s;
• disseminating information while keeping the survivor/victim’s identity confidential; and
• using the local media.

There are significant challenges in undertaking this kind of local advocacy. For example, where the issues are generic sectoral issues, the women must deal with the sexist and condescending attitudes of the male local leaders. It is difficult to make women’s participation and voices significant in the planning and implementation of general campaigns, and to persuade such organizations to integrate women-specific issues in the sectors’ priority concerns. In campaigns involving women’s or gender-specific issues, problems range from indifference and antagonism, to outright male bias among local officials. Bias is encountered with the police, local officials (including some women), the local media, the community and sometimes even the families of the victims/survivors. Further, those in authority and those with wealth – who are often the targets of advocacy – use their office and/or financial resources to harass and buy-off the abused and complainants. Other problems include the limited knowledge that grassroots women have about laws and policies, and the scarcity of financial and material resources to follow cases up.

Notwithstanding these challenges, local advocacy efforts have achieved a number of gains, including the following:

• amicable settlement of disputes between Local Government Unit (LGU), market management and women vendors, which resulted in the provision of stall spaces for members of the women ambulant vendors’ organization in Mariveles, Bataan;
• safe return of migrant workers from their abusive employers abroad;
• filing of cases against wife abusers, rapists and sexual harassers, as well as provision of support for the victims/survivors, in certain cases with significant assistance from other women’s NGOs; and
• granting of disputed land to an urban poor organization largely composed of women in Calauag, Quezon.

**National Level Advocacy**

Advocacy at the national level is carried out primarily with the coalitions and networks mentioned above. Legislative and policy advocacy are the main forms of advocacy at the national level. The Women’s Agenda serves as the guide for choosing issues and defining strategies, but the federation ensures that its membership is supportive of the advocacy being carried out. This entails continuous consultation and education.

Legislative advocacy includes the following activities:

• drafting bills – with the participation of women and women’s groups involved in the issue of focus;
• consulting other women’s groups;
• identifying a core lobby group;
• scanning of existing legislative proposals in Congress;
• negotiations with possible authors in Congress, and offering technical support to the bill’s primary authors;
• developing and circulating materials on the bill in popular form;
• holding dialogues with Congressional Representatitives;
• identifying allies and “enemies” in Congress;
• holding training on issue advocacy;
• carrying out mass actions and pressure politics;
• organizing media advocacy and public education – press releases, press conferences, guest interviews on TV and radio programs, etc;
• participating in the legislative process, such as committee meetings, consultations and hearings;
• coordinating with technical and secretariat staff in Congress;
• defining maximum and minimum position on the bills;
• developing position papers;
• carrying out signature campaigns, and letter, telegram and fax barrages to legislators;
• encouraging local women’s groups to lobby with their respective Congressional representatives.

Given the scope of the legislative advocacy, DSWP relies on a range of activists with diverse talents and skills, such as:

• technical people: feminist lawyers, researchers, writers for legislative proposals and position papers and spokespersons who participate directly in the legislative process;
• core lobbyists: including tacticians and strategists;
• constituents: a critical mass of organized women with skilled leaders and spokespeople.

Another type of national advocacy deals with ongoing social problems rather than specific legislation. The objective is to draw the attention of the national government to issues such as machismo in government, graft and corruption, militarism and militarization, trade liberalization and neo-liberal economic policies, oil price increases, cronyism and the Marcoses. Activities in this type of advocacy include mass rallies and mobilization, media campaigns, forums and conferences.

**International Level Advocacy**

DSWP’s international advocacy is not as strong as its work at the local and national levels. The advocacy in the international arena is primarily focused on the United Nations (UN), and the Socialist International Women (SIW). The federation was actively involved in pre-Beijing activities as well as in lobbying during the Beijing Conference itself. The DSWP National Chair headed the Philippine NGO lobby group. DSWP was also involved in the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) in Copenhagen, Denmark. While DSWP’s international advocacy is a smaller part of its program, the federation recognizes that international instruments can influence the lives and relationships of women in their communities.

**Emphasizing Women’s Political Participation (WPP)**

Philippine politics is patriarchal and elitist. Rich, famous men dominate the political scene. The few women who make it into significant government positions are elite women from wealthy families who do not experience the same problems faced by ordinary women. Overall, women occupy less than 11% of all elected positions in government.

The importance of effective and meaningful women’s political participation cannot be overstated. DSWP firmly believes that advocacy will be easier if more feminist grassroots, community and sector-based women are in political positions, both in government and within mixed organizations and movements. Participation in elections as candidates, organizers and supporters is important, but it is not enough to make politics more inclusive and participatory. Politics continue long after the election winners are proclaimed. Continuous and sustained women’s political participation through informal and formal channels is imperative.

**Election-related activities**

Electoral advocacy has primarily focused on increasing the numbers of grassroots women elected to public office at the local level. To this end, DSWP has been involved in:

• Discussions and training on politics as an arena of women’s organizing;
• Orientation on the electoral system, laws, guidelines and other technical matters;
• Training and support for community-based women to run for public office at the local level;
• Developing area core groups which fulfill election-related technical requisites;
• Planning, coordinating and implementing campaigns, including fundraising, media work, and managing conflicts;
• Assisting in the development of the platform of government;
• Monitoring elections;
• Training on the Local Government Code (LGC) with focus on opportunities for women’s participation in Local Government Units (LGUs) and Local Special Bodies (LSBs); and
• Negotiating with women candidates and select men candidates on the Women’s Agenda.

One key advocacy issue was the need for the LGUs to implement the 5% budgetary allocation for gender-specific initiatives. This is a provision in the General Appropriations Act (GAA) which mandates government agencies at all levels to reserve at least 5% of their budgets for women’s concerns. The provision has existed since 1995 but has been poorly implemented. Few candidates and incumbent officials know about it. The women of the DSWP have become the source of information as well as materials on this issue.

In 1997 DSWP decided on criteria for chapters to use in selecting candidates. These were: a) the candidates’ positions and track record on women’s issues, such as VAW, health, poverty, women’s political participation and the delivery of social services; b) commitment to the Women’s Agenda; and c) the candidates’ program of government. Where there were specific candidates averse to women’s issues, DSWP groups actively campaigned against them.

A Closer Look At Electoral Advocacy: Constituency-Building for the Party List Law

In 1995, the Party List System Act was signed, and in 1998 implemented for the first time. In an attempt to promote the representation of disadvantaged and often underrepresented sectors, organizations and parties, the law reserved 20% (52 seats) of the total number of seats in the House for organizations and political parties which garner at least 2% of the total votes cast at the national level. Women were among the sectors identified as eligible for representation under the law. In the 1998 elections, the law provided an opportunity for women, and specifically grassroots, community and sector-based women, to occupy positions in the country’s House of Representatives.

DSWP followed the debates and process related to the Party List Law keenly. The organization held numerous meetings with other mass and rural-based organizations to both critique the law and explore how the law could benefit them, including defining what their roles might be. In these meetings, initially grassroots leaders were concerned about how they would be able to play a role in the organizations which had already decided to participate in the elections. The women articulated their concerns on the background, composition and track record of these groups, challenging their commitment to grassroots women.

The decision to organize BABAYI was taken by DSWP chapter organizations with participation from several rural-based groups outside of the federation when it became clear that all other women’s party list groups were composed or led by middle-class, schooled or elite women. The grassroots leaders articulated their desire for an organization that would not treat them as mere supporters. They wanted to be active participants and play a role in decision-making for the party, which they felt would not be possible in the other organizations. At the same time, they recognized that the Party List Law presented the possibility of expanding the concept of representative politics and democratizing the legislative process. Thus, BABAYI was born.

BABAYI was an experiment because it was an entirely new experience in the history of Philippine politics. There were a range of inevitable difficulties which women confronted pragmatically, such as:

• Lack of financial resources. Everybody knew that there was very little money for BABAYI, and that raising funds directly for electoral processes was prohibited. At the same time, everyone was aware that elections are essentially a money game, and that the women who made up BABAYI were poor;
• Lack of political or electoral experience. The great majority of those who got involved in BABAYI were neophytes in the field of elections, especially at the national level;
• Lack of connections. BABAYI had no connections with national political figures, nor with the media; and
• Lack of visibility and public recognition. BABAYI had no well-known personalities within its ranks.

These limitations were compounded by the fact that the electorate hardly knew the Party List Law existed, and many
disadvantaged sectors were skeptical about the value of elections.

There were, however, also strengths to balance these difficulties. The major strength was the pure idealism of the women which motivated them to work hard and sacrifice whatever resources they had for BABAYI. They were uncompromising in their opposition to the traditional and elitist type of politics normally practiced, and had a vision and commitment to creating an alternative, more inclusive type of politics.

Unlike other party list groups, BABAYI had a built-in constituency at the national level. Enormous effort was expended in gaining the support and participation of thousands of other rural-based women’s organizations. Eventually, BABAYI had more than 3,000 local women’s groups – poor women’s organizations – as its members.

Another difference from other women’s party list groups was the manner in which BABAYI selected nominees to represent it in the House of Representatives if it won. BABAYI ensured that there was geographic and sectoral spread i.e. Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao had representatives as well as major sectors such as workers, peasants, youth. In the end, BABAYI’s list of nominees was the only one which included ordinary women. BABAYI ran its campaign on the basis of women’s ideals of what politics should be, rather than how politics has been practiced for so long. BABAYI’s positions, even on controversial issues, were never compromised, even if it meant antagonizing traditional groups and losing votes. The campaign was viewed as a rare moment when the public is inclined to listen to women.

Some of the electoral activities carried out were:

- development, production and mass distribution of BABAYI’s legislative agenda (see Appendix A);
- development, production and distribution of information materials on the party list law;
- development and implementation of a campaign plan;
- strategy meetings;
- establishment of BABAYI core groups at barangay (village) level;
- local meetings, forums, women’s rallies and other gatherings, and house-to-house campaigning;
- election and post-election monitoring.

These electoral efforts yielded the following results:

- A better understanding among DSWP grassroots and community-based women members as well as other rural-based groups of the concept of “authentic” politics and the importance of women’s participation in politics.

- An increase in the number of women, and specifically grassroots and community-based women, who ran for local office. More than 260 DSWP local leaders ran and won in the 1997 barangay elections, constituting about 65% of the total number of DSWP leaders who ran in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

- A grassroots, women-led national alliance was accredited by the official agency for party list elections. The campaign period was used to do consciousness-raising on women’s issues and advocacy for laws and policies for women. It was a chance to bring women’s issues to public attention and also to learn from women in other areas.

- A significant number of local women’s groups are now represented on the Local Special Bodies in many areas of the country.

- DSWP chapters have a more positive, constructive relationship with LGUs in many areas. It is now common for LGU officials to consult women’s organizations in their areas about LGU programs and activities.

- LGU officials have shown an increased interest in women’s issues. DSWP members observe that sometimes the LGUs are not opposed to women’s issues, but they may not know what to do.
Advocacy Since the 1998 Elections

Since the elections, the DSWP has been involved in lobbying for more gender-sensitive legislation and policies. To this end, DSWP has conducted advocacy training and has lobbied for electoral reforms, improved legislation and services for women workers, and bills on sexual harassment, and rape. These advocacy efforts, most of which were carried out with networks and coalitions, have achieved the following advances for women:

- **at the national level**, the enactment of the laws on daycare centers, party list, paternity leave, sexual harassment and rape;
- **at the local level**, (though connected with national level advocacy), the passing of women-friendly resolutions and ordinances such as providing bonuses for daycare workers, Barangay Health Workers (BHWs) and Barangay Nutrition Scholars, getting financial, medical and legal assistance to women victims/survivors of violence, and obtaining support for women’s livelihood projects in some municipalities.

Advocacy strategies and activities in mixed organization differ slightly -- including some activities aimed at improving how these organizations treat their women members. For example, DSWP advocated for a quota system for women and other pro-women provisions and policies in mixed organizations. In addition, DSWP conducted gender-sensitivity workshops for men leaders of their partner organizations and discussions on women’s issues with groups representing workers, peasants, fisherfolks, youth and the urban poor.

These initiatives helped to achieve:

- Adoption of pro-women provisions in statutes of DSWP partner organizations. DSWP’s work within the PDSP paved the way for the Party Congress’ of a quota system which allocates at least 30% of all elected seats in Party structures to women. PDSP is the first political party in the country to do this. The Party also implemented a clear policy against sexual harassment long before Philippine Congress enacted the law on this;
- Adoption of pro-women provisions in the statutes of the Lakas Manggagawa Labor Center (LMLC);
- Adoption of pro-women policies in local peasant organizations.

This advances produced a significant increase of elected women in the structures of these organizations, and an improved understanding of gender issues as evidenced by the integration of the women’s perspectives in official documents. There is growing recognition and appreciation of women’s abilities in mixed groups. Importantly, DSWP has identified male allies to advocate on women’s issues in mixed organizations.

Challenges and More Challenges

Despite some important advances during the last several years, DSWP’s approach to advocacy is not without its share of weaknesses and problems.

*The holistic approach is time-consuming and entails a lot of human, material and financial resources.* The federation’s strength is its human resources. There are area-based leaders who are committed to organizing on the federation’s issues on a voluntary basis. However, because of the nature of DSWP’s membership, the federation lacks leaders with technical skills and expertise. DSWP will have to invest more resources into technical capacity-building. In the meantime, the DSWP national office handles the growing demand.

*Material and financial resources are always scarce.* The federation cannot significantly depend on its membership for all of the material and financial resources it needs for its work. They already donate significant amounts of their time. The DSWP needs to find ways of raising funds that make the work sustainable.

*Attempting to work on several problems at the same time is taxing, time- and resource- consuming, and overwhelming.* At times other groups perceive DSWP as lacking focus because of its involvement in so many issues. Nevertheless, the federation needs to keep abreast of what is happening on all fronts to meet the interests and...
needs of its members.

Working with or attempting to influence men – even the “progressive” ones – can be frustrating. While women can generally identify with other women, making the education work less taxing, it takes much time, patience, control and effort to work with men. Often men say that women’s issues are important, but not as important as other “national” issues. Even progressive men often think that if the “national” issues are resolved, women’s problems will automatically be solved. While men may accept the importance of women’s issues at the ideological level, translating this into concrete action, especially in their organizational and personal lives is a different matter.

DSWP’s use of the participatory approach sometimes prevents quick action. This is especially true with respect to more controversial issues which require thorough discussions and consultations.

Insights and Learning from Doing Advocacy

For advocacy to be effective, a holistic approach is critical, particularly if the advocacy is to garner the support and direct involvement of the ordinary women it aims to serve. Different strategies yield different results, but all contribute to the success of advocacy at different moments and in different contexts. Some key lessons from advocacy include the following:

Organizing and constituency building is a must.
To be effective, advocacy on women’s issues must be supported by a critical mass. Ordinary women must not only understand the issues, they must own them. This means that the poor, ordinary women’s issues must be at the forefront of the advocacy. If this is so, community, grassroots women and women’s groups will lead, and not simply support, the advocacy.

Public education is essential.
Advocacy success depends on support from the broader public and that demands information and education. Use of the media is indispensable because it reaches all corners of the country.

The participatory approach needs to be balanced with outputs.
While participatory methodologies are critical to ensuring that women steer and therefore, own, the advocacy process, advocates equally need to be able to act and respond quickly to specific situations. This is especially true for legislative advocacy which needs to be closely synchronized with the legislative process. To this end, it is necessary for constituencies to give lobbyists a mandate to be able to make decisions and maneuver quickly. It is also important for them to come to joint agreement and clarity about a minimum and maximum position to define the parameters of negotiation.

Advocacy at different levels need to be coordinated and sustained.
National level advocacy must be truly national. Activities must not be concentrated in the urban areas, and in the case of the Philippines, in Metro Manila. When advocacy does not have a meaningful base across the country, it is easily dismissed by legislators or other targets as the actions of a few noisy, urban, troublemakers.

Negotiating skills are a must.
Negotiations inevitably happen at some stage in successful advocacy. The advocates need to be armed with negotiating skills, a clear grasp of the issue at hand, a clear position and the data necessary to back up that position. Tact and articulateness are important qualities. Women advocates need to assess when being “irritating” can work for the advocacy, and when it can harm it. Advocates must keep in mind that there will be future advocacy campaigns, and so, it is important to avoid needlessly antagonizing people who are in a decision-making role.

Advocacy requires common sense.
Doing advocacy can be frustrating. It brings the advocates eye-to-eye with the people and institutions invested in perpetuating the status quo. The idealism of advocates need to be tempered with pragmatism. If one attempt at advocacy fails, there are always lessons to be learned. Advocates can try again, and use other strategies to achieve their desired gains. The important thing is the recognition that advocacy is a never-ending task. As long as there are advocates with a desire for change, there will be advocacy.