

Gender Policies And Responses Towards Greater Women Empowerment In The Philippines

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Abstract

In keeping with UN initiatives on women's empowerment, the Philippines has been coming up with policies on gender in the forms of law, executive order, memorandum circulars, and local ordinances. The most important of these are the Women in Development and Nation Building Act and the Gender and Development budget. Many programs are embarked upon by gender-sensitive policy makers themselves, women and men. Non-governmental organizations oriented towards women's needs, economic as well as welfare, have been active advocates for gender policies. International donor agencies have also been actively involved in gender programs in the Philippines. All these have helped, in no small measure, in advancing the status of women in the country.

The high status of women in the Philippines can be gauged by its high Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM); its high Gender Development Index (GDI) show the relatively good standing of men and women. However, more have to be done to achieve gender equality; these include greater women's representation in governance and more equal share of income between men and women.

Introduction

The United Nations started focusing the world's attention on the plight of women in 1975 when it declared the Decade of Women through an international conference in Mexico City. That conference led to another one in Copenhagen in 1980, in Nairobi in 1985, and in Beijing in 1995. Those conferences were complemented by more UN initiatives, such as the UN Convention against All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UNCEDAW), the Beijing Platform of Action, and the Beijing Plus Five Women Outcome Document. In fact, one current UN thrust is gender and governance, to assure that women are able to participate actively in policy-making. The latest UN actions are summits of women local elective officials, starting with a regional conference in Phitsanulok, Thailand, and now, with country summits; the first one was held in the Philippines in May 2003. Others followed in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

Another UN initiative is the annual Human Development Report starting in 1990 which measures the HDI or human development index. It evolved to include the GDI (gender development index) and in 1995, the GEM (gender empowerment measure). Defined as "the process of enlarging people's choices", human development looks at improving the quality of human life. Strategies geared for human development include availability of and access to basic services, such as health services, education, welfare, clean environment, as well as livelihood. It targets sectors previously neglected in development efforts; women is one such sector.

These all square well with the theme of the UN social development summit held in Copenhagen in 1995.

Human Development

HDI measures the quality of life using four main categories: life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate, combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment, and gross domestic product per capita. In earlier years, infant mortality was also a main indicator. Countries are compared with each other after computing for these indicators.

The GDI compares males and females in each country using these indicators. The GEM measures seats in parliament held by women, female legislators, senior officials, and managers, female professional and technical workers, and ratio of estimated female to male earned income. When the UNDP first introduced the GEM in 1995, it said in its Report:

The recognition of equal rights for women, along with men, and the determination to combat discrimination on the basis of gender, are achievements equal in importance to the abolition of slavery, the elimination of colonialism, and the establishment of equal rights for social and ethnic minorities. (UNDP, 1995:1)

It added:

Moving toward gender equality is not a technological goal—it is a political process... (Thus), the human development paradigm, which puts people at the center of its concerns, must be fully engendered. (Ibid., 1-2)

It introduced the “engendered development model”... which aimed to widen choices between women and men”. What is important, according to that Report, “is that equal opportunities to make that choice exist for both women and men “ (Ibid., 2)

Each annual report looks at other factors, such as poverty, economic performance, technology, consumption, or people’s participation. However, GDI and GEM are always part of the computed tables.

It is always interesting to note that HDI, GDI and GEM do not always correspond, except in a few areas. For instance, the perennial top HDI countries in 2002 are Norway, Sweden, and Canada; the three countries with the highest GDI are Australia, Belgium, and Norway. The highest GEM indexes are found in Norway, Iceland, and Sweden. These are more glaring if we look at Asian countries. For instance, in 2002, Malaysia ranked 59th in the HDI, Thailand, 70th, and the Philippines, 77th. Malaysia ranked 54 in GDI, Thailand is 60th, and the Philippines, 63rd. These mean that women are not really far from the men in terms of health, education, and livelihood opportunities. For GEM, however, Malaysia ranks 43rd, Thailand, 50th, and the Philippines, 35th. These show that women are able to participated in decision-making. It can be seen that the Philippines has a much higher GEM index than its HDI. (See Table I)

Table I
PHILIPPINE HDI, GDI, GEM
1995-2002

YEAR	HDI	GDI	GEM
1995	100	64	28(Partial)
1996	95	70	39
1997	98	81	35
1998	98	82	46
1999	77	65	45
2000	77	64	44
2001	70	62	46
2002	77	63	35

All three Southeast Asian countries seem to rank higher in GDI and GEM than the HDI. On the other hand, there are countries whose HDIs are high but their GEMs are lower; for instance, the Republic of Korea ranks 27th in the HDI and a close GDI rank at 27th, but ranks 61st in the GEM. Japan ranks 9 in HDI, 11 in GDI and 32 in GEM. (These are indeed high ranks; we are only showing the discrepancy with HDI and GEM.) Many countries with low HDIs do not even have data with which to rank their GEMs.

The following table shows changes in indicators for HDI, GDI and GEM for the Philippines, using 1995 data (the year GEM was first computed) and 2002. (See Table II)

Table II
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS FOR THE PHILIPPINES
1995 and 2002

Indicators	1995	2002
HDI Rank	100	77
Life Expectancy	66.3	69.3
Adult Literacy	94.0	95.3
Combined Gross Enrollment (Elementary, High School, Tertiary)	77	82
Real GDP per capita	\$ 2,550	\$ 3,971

GDI Rank	64	63
Life Expectancy		
Female	68.2	71.3
Male	64.5	67.3
Adult Literacy		
Female	93.7	95.1
Male	94.4	95.5
Combined Gross Enrollment		
Female	78.2	84
Male	76.6	80
Earned Income		
Female	21.1 (share)	\$ 2,933
Male	78.9 (share)	\$ 4,994
GEM Rank	28	35
Seats of women in Parliament	11.2	17.2
Administrators and Managers	27.7	35
Professional and Technical Workers	63.2	66
Earned Income Share	29.9	.59

AS shown in Table II, the Philippines' HDI rank improved from 100 in 1995 to 77 in 2002. Its GDI rank improved only by one point, from 64 to 63. While its GEM rank may be seen to go down from 28 to 35, it can be explained by the fact that not all countries had GEM ranks computed at that time; GEM was only computed for 116 countries, while GDI was computed for 130 and HDI for 174, due to lack of gender disaggregated data for some countries. While not all countries had complete data for 2002, more countries reported, so the Philippines' rank of 35 is still high. Moreover, the discrepancy for 1995 and 2002 data may also be due to the sinking value of the Philippine peso, which suffered the decline in the Asian economy in 1997.

Historical and Cultural Barriers

What makes the Philippines rank medium in the HDI and high in the GEM? Is it the oft-repeated stereotype that the women in the Philippines enjoy a higher status than their sisters in other parts of the world? Although the Philippines has had two women Presidents, this stereotype is not necessarily true. Like women in other Asian countries, historical, cultural and other barriers have prevented them from obtaining a more equal status

with the men. Nonetheless, the activism of its women in leadership positions in government and the community, as well as the support of some of its enlightened male leaders, have brought about policies and programs which have improved the gender balance in the country.

Historically, the native women of the Philippines enjoyed high socio-economic status. They could own property, contribute to the economy, even serve as priestesses, or ascend to the tribal throne (Salazar, 2000). Spanish colonization which began in 1521 and ended in 1898 relegated the native women to home and (the Catholic) church. On the other hand, American colonization (1898-1946), which opened the public schools to women as well as the professions, was not able to raise the social consciousness of the Filipinos which trapped the women in the double standard of morality. It took many years of efforts from more gender-conscious women and gender-sensitive men who were in decision-making positions or in influential organizations to gradually peel off the barriers to fuller women's emancipation.

The suffragettes during the American regime succeeded, after a long battle, to get the vote for the women in the Philippines in 1937. (Aquino, 1994). But while women got the vote, and more registered women than men actually voted, there has not been a woman's vote, in the sense that they have not really gotten certain candidates elected (Tapales, 1993). Nor did the women run for office. Very few have, such that Congress has only had 10% women (the Senate has slightly more now at 12.5%). (Aguilar, 1992; Naz, 2002). The party list system has enabled more women to be represented in Congress. At the local level, the percentages of women city and municipal mayors (2001 election figures) are 13.54% and 13.8%, respectively. Women governors account for 16.4% of the 79 Governors. (Tapales, 2002). My own study also showed that women local chief executives belong to the political economic elite; they are relatives of local or national politicians. (See Table III)

Table III
ELECTED WOMEN GOVERNORS, CITY AND MUNICIPAL MAYORS
1992, 1995, 1998 and 2001

Position	No. of Female LCEs	No. of LGUs Reporting	% of Female LCEs to Total
1992			
Governors	5	75	6.67
City Mayors	2	67	2.99
Municipal Mayors	117	1,536	7.62
1995			
Governors	8	75	10.7
City Mayors	4	68	5.9
Municipal Mayors	125	1,536	8.14
1998			
Governors	12	75	16.0
City Mayors	7	77	9.0

Municipal Mayors	220	1,525	14.4
2001			
Governors	13	79	16.4
City Mayors	13	96	13.54
Municipal Mayors (<i>Partial</i>)	200	1,495	13.4

However, women are active in the bureaucracy where 35% of the higher civil servants are women. Like the elected policy makers, these women make policy decisions or rules of policy implementation. Technical and professional ranks in the civil service are female-dominated, at 53%. Women do not numerically dominate the lowest ranks in the bureaucracy. (See Table IV) While not initiators of policy, personnel in second level positions are the actual implementers and deal directly with the clientele of public institutions (Tapales, 2003). A third category of non-executive career personnel was added in the last decade. Figures show that the women in that level are grossly out numbered at only 11%.

Table IV
NUMBER OF GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL IN THE CAREER SERVICE
BY SEX AND LEVEL OF POSITION
1999

Level of Position	Both Sexes	Male	Female	%
Total	1,250,510	556,146	694,364	
First Level	521,428	340,775	180,653	35
Second Level	709,429	199,028	510,401	53
Third Level	4,981	3,247	1,734	35
Non-Executive Career	14,672	13,096	1,576	11

Outside of government, are very active women leaders of NGOs who push for gender-oriented policies. We can also count on enlightened male legislators who have initiated gender-responsive policies. (Naz, 2002), or gender-sensitive male local chief executives and bureaucrats who are supportive of gender programs.

Executive Initiatives

The EDSA social upheaval in 1986 (now called EDSA I) spawned a populist Constitution drafted by representatives of different sectors. The multi-sectoral nature of the Constitutional Commission placed provisions in the 1987 Constitution upholding “equality before the law of women and men” and recognizing the role of women in nation building. It also provided protection for working women. EDSA I and the Constitution became the corner stones for government policies on women after 1986.

Early in the term of the first women President in the country, the staunch Catholic Corazon Aquino issued Executive Order 209. Called the Family Code of the Philippines, the order corrected the double standard of morality in the Civil Code as far as marital issues of adultery and concubinage are concerned, and dealt on issues of adoption and legitimacy of children. Moreover, the EO provided for annulment of marriage in a country which could not (and still cannot) pass a divorce law.

It must be emphasized that the Philippines under Marcos already established the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) in 1975, through Presidential Decree 633; therefore, the Philippines’ response is as old as the UN’s Decade of Women. Its creation was pushed by women NGOs under the umbrella organization of the Civic Assembly of Women of the Philippines (now the National Council of Women of the Philippines). Under the leadership of the First Lady Imelda Marcos, NCRFW conducted programs following the UN’s Global Program of Action, and the Commission patterned its actions after the Women in Development (WID/WAD) framework (NCRFW:2000)

However, EDSA I brought NGO leaders and some from the private sector into government. A staunch woman NGO leader, Remedios Rikken, became Executive Director of NCRFW. With a Commission led by then Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs and later Senator Leticia Ramos Shahani and other women NGO leaders, the NCRFW embarked on new directions. Working with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the United Nations, NCRFW went into strategies for gender mainstreaming, following the 1980 Copenhagen Plan of Action and the Forward Looking Strategies in Nairobi in 1985. It conducted gender sensitivity training in government agencies, established gender focal points, and worked to address gender issues in policies and programs in government, following the UN’s Gender and Development (GAD) framework (Ibid.). With women in the academe and NGOs, NCRFW crafted the Philippine Plan for Women (PDPW) for 1989 to 1992, which was adopted through the Presidents’ Executive Order 348.

During the term of President Fidel Ramos, NCRFW doubled efforts to sustain strategies using the GAD framework. Again, with its partners in the academe and NGOs, NCRFW came out with the Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development, for 1995 to 2025. This was adopted through Executive Order 273. These resulted in “policy imperatives addressing gender concerns, development planning for women, setting up GAD institutional mechanisms, GAD focal points, GAD training for national agencies and offices, GAD data base and gender

statistics, and strengthening of partnerships with women NGOs” (Barua-Yap, 2003). NCRFW also spearheaded the writing of the country’s Beijing Plan of action.

Under President Joseph Estrada, the executive branch drafted the GAD Plan for Action: Philippine Agenda for Women Empowerment. Among its provisions was the opening of a P3 billion lending window for women entrepreneurs in government lending institutions. That was broadened as the Framework Plan for Women under the current administration of the second woman President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

For its part, the Civil Service Commission issued an anti sexual harassment policy in government agencies, complete with guidelines for implementation for each agency.

Gender Reforms from Congress

Through the initiative of the first sectoral representative of women in Congress, Republic Act 6949 declared March 8 as a special working holiday, in consonance with International Women’s Day. The Philippines actually celebrates March as women’s month.

Assistance to mothers was provided by RA 6972 which established a day care center in every barangay (village). RA 8505 called for the establishment in every province and city a crisis center for the care and safety of rape survivors.

Protection to women workers was given during the early part of the Republic; RA 679 laid down rules for the employment of women and minors; these were expanded by RA 6237 and RA 6725. RA 1584 granted maternity leave privileges to women working in the government. In 1960, The Bureau of Women and Minors was established in the Department of Labor. Women in the micro and cottage industries were provided protection by RA 7882. A law exists which prohibits lesser compensation for women as against male employees for work of equal value; RA 7655 also prohibits favoring of male employees with respect to promotion, training, study, and scholarship opportunities.

The most comprehensive law on women is the so-called Roco-Rasul bill (named after its sponsors, then Rep. Raul Roco and Senator Santanina Rasul) the Woman in Development and Nation-Building Act (RA 7192). On the economic aspect, it provides equal rights to wives entering into contract and loan agreements. It opened military schools to women as well as the police academies. Furthermore, it allowed women equal access to social and cultural clubs. Passed in 1991, the law led to the acceptance of the first batch of women into the Philippine Military Academy, and the increase in the number of women in the police service. Moreover, with the implementation of the act, borrowing for livelihood assistance became easier for women, who can now obtain credit on their own.

There is now a pending bill in Congress, which calls for gender balance in policy and decision-making government positions, elective or appointive, sponsored by Rep. Loretta Ann Rosales (Pananaw, April-July 2003).

The Women in Development and Nation Building Act also provided that a percentage of foreign assistance be earmarked for programs for women. This was followed through in the General Appropriations Act (GAA) which, in 1995, set aside 5% of funds for gender and development (GAD) projects. Recently, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) issued a joint memorandum

circular requiring local government units to also set aside funds for GAD projects. However, the mandatory requirement is only 5% of the local government's development fund, which is only 20% of its IRA (Internal Revenue Allotment).

There are many more laws and policies affecting women, but these are the most significant. Within these parameters, however, creative agency heads and local chief executives have come up with their own programs on GAD.

Agency and Local Government Initiatives

Gender issues seem to have caught the attention of policy makers, such that a higher level of consciousness for these concerns are now seen in national government agencies and local government units.

Before the anti-sexual harassment policy of the Civil Service Commission, other policy initiatives were introduced by the CSC. The CSC was the first government agency to open a day care center. It was opened in the early 90s by then Chair Patricia Sto. Tomas (now Secretary of Labor). She provided funds for the caregivers and provided a room for the children. Parents pitched in for other expenses. As she narrates, the day care center within the office premises minimized absenteeism from the mothers/employees, who had to be absent when they had no help for their children at home. She also discovered that her women lawyers, particularly, became more productive, because they did not have to check on their children constantly, assured of their safety. (Interview by the author).

After the success of CSC, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) followed suit. Other agencies followed, such that there is now a day care center in most of the government offices. At the local level, some cities have also established day care centers at City Hall. Councilor (later Vice-Mayor) Connie Angeles of Quezon City opened the YAKAP (embrace) center in the City Hall premises for children of City employees.

Quezon City, through then Vice-Mayor Charito Planas, was also the first to establish a woman's desk at its police station. Now, every police station has a woman's desk. The policewomen staffing those desks are able to elicit more complaints of domestic violence and rape from the women and children who are able to trust them; it was observed before that telling their ordeal to policemen was especially difficult for the women victims. Now every police station has a woman's desk, and more cases of rape and domestic violence are filed.

The province of Bulacan is the first local government unit to establish an office for women. Its Panlalawigang Komisyon para sa Kababihan (Provincial Commission for Women) was established by then Governor Roberto Pagdanganan in the early 90s. The current Governor, Josefina de la Cruz, has continued the support and encouragement to the Commission. Other provinces with gender offices are Cebu and Misamis Occidental.

Other local government units have followed. The first cities to establish gender offices are Davao in Mindanao, Angeles in Luzon, and Bacolod in the Visayas. Probably the first municipality to do so is Balayan, Batangas, which has won a Galing Pook (good local unit) award for its integrated gender sensitive health program. In northern Luzon, Mayor Mary Jane Ortega has an active gender program. In Metro Manila, Quezon City and Marikina are the first to establish offices for GAD, with Quezon City establishing its Gender Resource and

Development Office in 2001 and Marikina its Women's Council in 2002. With the creation of its GAD Office under the Office of Mayor Feliciano Belmonte, Jr., there is also a corresponding GAD Council which maps out projects for women (Palma, RWS, 2002). For its part, Marikina City under Mayor Marides Fernando is hosting an international conference of women mayors late this month.

Davao City and Misamis Occidental province have GAD Codes. These are models used for similar efforts in other local government units.

Without formal offices established for gender concerns, many mayors have initiated or supported gender programs. For instance, Mayor Betty Verzola of Kalinga uses 5% of her internal revenue allotments (IRA) to support a livelihood program to further develop the weaving skills of women in the community. Quezon City has established a Grameen type banking where its indigent women can avail of livelihood loans without collateral from a Bulacan rural bank (Almario-Zabat, 2003). They borrow through their cooperative. A study has shown the success of this program, where payment of loans is almost 100% and families have been assisted in small entrepreneurial projects. In Sta. Maria, Bulacan where NGOs are active, then Mayor Reyliana Nicolas (now Congresswoman) count on the women as partners of the municipal government in many projects.

Among women mayors and Barangay captains, health and family concerns seem to be priority programs. Some women Mayors have won awards for their health service; among these is movie actress-Mayor Vilma Santos Recto of Lipa City. Two women barangay captains in Quezon City have been enthusiastically sponsoring awareness workshops on violence against women, where the police women's desk officers and prosecutors tell women residents of incidence of violence and how they can bring cases against perpetrators. In another Quezon City barangay, the captain has added three day care centers to one existing which is co-funded by the City government; her three centers are fully funded by the village. Two Quezon City barangays have healing centers for survivors of violence in intimate relationships.

A pioneering work is night care for children of working mothers, piloted in Taytay, Rizal, and an industrial area where women work in night shifts. The national government's Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), its local counterpart, the municipal government of Taytay, the Catholic and Protestant churches in the town, and the factory management organization combined efforts to provide the service. Mothers who are off work some nights volunteer their services to assist the caregivers (Review of Women's Studies, 2002).

Women Outside of Government

NCRFW has been able to succeed in many of its endeavors through effective cooperation between itself and its partner NGOs, academic institutions, and the international funding agencies. Consultations for many of its policy proposals are held in cooperation with NGOs. Members of the academe have ably assisted in writing some of its publications, providing technical support, or acting as facilitators and resource persons in training programs.

The most recent NCRFW-academe collaboration is the Summit of Women Local Chief Executives and Legislators held last March 13-15 in Manila. The program was designed by the two institutions with the collaboration of the women involved the Lady Local Legislator's League, the League of Lady Municipal Mayors of

the Philippines, and active women members of the League of Cities and the Philippine Councilors League. Also involved were politically oriented women NGOs—the Women in Nation- Building, the Ugnayan ng Kababaihan sa Pulitika (Union of Women in Politics), and the Center for Legislative Development. With NCRFW as convenor, the secretariat was composed of the University of the Philippines Center for Women’s Studies and the Center for Local and Regional Governance of the National College of Public Administration and Governance, University of the Philippines. The Summit produced the Manila Declaration, which called for gender responsive local governance, a complement of the Asia Pacific women’s conference output in 2001, the Phitsanulok Declaration. NCRFW will soon embark on a pilot trainers’ training for new women local officials elected in 2004.

Probably the most impressive collaboration between government and the community is Mother’s Clubs in Surigao City, Mindanao. A midwife, who worked in the City health office, organized mothers in the community into health clubs. The Mother Clubs undertakes nutrition and health activities, and has expanded into cooperatives for mutual assistance for health and funeral insurance. They also got their husbands organized into sanitation groups called BESIG, and the children into clubs. (Celestino and Ilago, 1998)

At the national level, many women-oriented NGOs are involved not only in bringing issues to the attention of decision-makers, but also in undertaking activities to bring about reforms to solve or improve the conditions of Filipino women. For instance, GABRIELA has been known for legal assistance and moral support to the so-called “comfort women” of the Second World War. The Women’s Legal Bureau assists women victims of domestic violence and other forms of injustice. Some groups help prostituted women—BUKAL and SINAG are just two of them. Other active groups of women include IGOROTA, IMA, Pilipina, and Kalayaan. Peasant-led women’s groups are KBP and AMIHAN; labor groups include Sentro ng Manggagawang Pilipina. There are also mainstream women’s organizations like the Soroptimists and the Zonta Clubs which provide assistance to women in livelihood, health and environmental protection projects; they also assist villages in human rights activities. These combine socio-civic organizations, religious and professional groups.

Then of course, we have international donors, which have increased efforts in looking at issues affecting women—UN, CIDA, ADB, World Bank, AUSAID, USAID, SIDA, Ford Foundation, and other funding agencies. They either have special programs for women, or make sure that in their program assistance, there are components on women, or that the impact of their programs on women are assessed. UN and CIDA have especially been helpful; for instance, the recently concluded Summit of women local officials was jointly funded by UNESCAP, UNDP, and CIDA. UNESCAP will also fund the training of women local officials elected in 2004.

Empowering the Filipino Women

Culture is a reinforcement or a stumbling block to women’s empowerment. In the Philippines, the historical experience of relative independence of the native women which was corroded by Spanish colonization and gradually reformed by American colonization and Philippine independence has shown that the inherent spirit of the Filipino woman has been able to help her through conflicting values and experiences.

Yet, the more recent focus on women which the UN started and the more open attitude which evolved from socio-cultural changes in the country have helped provide for greater empowerment for the Filipino women.

But there are still issues which must be hurdled. For instance, while laws provide for better opportunities, some of these are not really implemented. The provision in the Local Government Code for sectoral representation (for women, workers, and other special groups) has not been implemented because of the reluctance of the national legislators to provide funds for sectoral elections; these are influenced by the parallel reluctance of local government officials to open the gates for those sectoral representatives.

In the communities, village day care centers (as well as those in urban barangays) serve as pre-schools, keeping the children for only a few hours a day; there should be more of the day-long day care centers like what exist in the government offices.

On a larger scale, the so-called GAD budget is not really set aside for agency or local projects. As reported by an Asia Foundation study in 2001, only 133 of 344 agencies (40%) reported GAD budgets in 1999 (latest available figures), and their GAD budgets covered only an average of .05% of their appropriations for the period. (Budlender, et.al.,2001) At the local government level, lack of information, confusion on interpretations of the 5%, as well as the lack of technical knowledge in gender planning, have hampered GAD budget implementation (Ibid.). Nonetheless, creative local chief executives, like Mayors Verzola and Fernando (cited above) have done much within what they appropriate for gender programs—5% of the internal revenue allotment only. It will be very useful to monitor compliance of the local governments with the new (but less) GAD budget.

The current global emphasis on gender in governance by the UN is a significant step towards greater gender empowerment. However, culture remains a hindrance to achieving its full intent. Studies I cited above show the reluctance of the Filipino women to run for political office, even as they accept positions of covert power (e.g., the higher civil service). My latest study on women local politicians show that, since 1998, there have been more women entering local politics; but many of them consider themselves as “breakers”, sitting in posts temporarily vacated by their husbands who have reached mandatory end of term of nine years (Tapales, 2002). What will be interesting is how many of them are able to stay after serving as temporary “breakers”.

In the bureaucracy, as previously mentioned, 35% of the career executive service officers are women, and 53% of the technical/professional personnel. This should be impressive, were it not for the fact that the figures 20 years ago showed that women already occupied 26% of the top positions in the bureaucracy (Tapales, 1984); therefore, it means that the proportion of women at the highest level increased by 9% in 20 years. Moreover, the non-executive career posts opened in recent years have not been penetrated by women. Filipino women really need the bill on equal representation passed.

In the economy, census figures for 2001 show that the labor participation rate of women is only 52.8%, whereas the LFPR of men is 80.3%. Moreover, women’s income share remains only .59 of that earned by men. Women’s unemployment rate has continued to increase; from 9.2% in 1999 to 9.9% in 2000 to 10.4% in 2001. More women college graduates are unemployed compared to the men (22.1% as against 13.4%); the figures are slightly reversed for unemployment rates for female and male high school graduates, at 27.7% for women and 29.4% for the men. (NCRFW, 2000). Some policy interventions are needed in the area of employment.

Be that as it may, the discussions above have shown that: (1) Filipino women enjoy a high status as decision-makers, as manifested by their high GEM index; (2) Many policies through law, executive order or local ordinance have provided more opportunities for women in the economy, in politics, as well as services for their welfare; (3) Male as well as female national and local policy-makers have initiated gender policies and programs; (4) Government, the community and private sector have been working together to bring about better conditions for Filipino women; (5) On their own, women-oriented groups have been working singly or together, to assist in empowerment efforts for women in the Philippines, and (6) Development assistance has been an important impetus for gender programs.

We may look forward to even higher GDI and GEM scores for the country. But unless we see overt changes in the socio-economic-political conditions of women in the country, we cannot really correlate those improving indexes.

Lastly, while we increase women's political participation, we hope to see more of the quality performance exemplified by our dynamic women leaders as discussed earlier. For women who make it in policy-making positions in government, Ms. Remedios Rikken of CAPWIP (Center for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics) calls upon them to be transformative leaders, who will serve as models for other women to follow in their steps. Training and orientation to gender awareness and programs will be most helpful.

Filipino women have indeed come a long way; but they have some more distance to go to be truly empowered. Nonetheless, there are clear signs that they are indeed moving forward.

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