

Women's Political Participation in the Philippines

Conversations, reflections and recommendations

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Abanse! Pinay

Akbayan Women's Committee

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Buklod Center

Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG)

Cordillera Women's Resource & Research Center (CWRRC)

EBGAN

Gabriela Women's Party (GWP)

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Kasama-Pilipina

Laban ng Masa Women

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Foreword

One World Action is delighted to introduce *Women's Political Participation in the Philippines – Conversations, reflections and recommendations*.

This comprehensive and inspiring report provides a history of the successes and challenges the women's movements have faced in the Philippines. From the struggle to obtain the right to vote, to the resistance during the Marcos years, this report documents the rise of feminist movements through to the current debates around quotas and gender budgets.

One World Action has been working in the Philippines since 1989, and is currently working with the Institute for Popular Democracy and the Institute of Politics and Governance to promote participatory democracy and gender equality.

This report is a powerful contribution to One World Action's groundbreaking campaign "More Women More Power", which is calling for women to be equally represented in all parliaments and elected bodies. More Women More Power is also calling for more political will and action to tackle the barriers that women face in politics – violence, discrimination and a lack of resources.

It is a deep privilege for One World Action to be working with its Filipino partners to advocate for an equal and gender-just world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Graham B" with a stylized flourish underneath.

Graham Bennett
Director
One World Action

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1 Introduction

'Encounters of discourse' is the term used to describe this project which is the culmination of many conversations with women leaders across the Philippines. This is part of an ongoing process – a stepping stone towards a more united set of actions towards transformational politics within and outside social movements.¹ This paper does not present a comprehensive analysis of the status and direction of women in politics and governance in the Philippines. Rather, it is a collection of reflections and insights from women leaders about the key issues and challenges of engendering politics and governance. We hope that it will contribute to the ongoing process of reflection amongst women leaders. Particularly women involved with social movements that are not solely focused on women, and on the strategies and directions of their feminist agenda within these social movements.

This project aimed to strengthen women's participation in politics and governance by facilitating a processes of collective reflection, assessment, agenda building and a reorientation of strategies for women's empowerment. It facilitated a series of semi-structured group discussions and individual interviews with women leaders across the Philippines. With women and women's groups in Metro Manila, Nueva Ecija, Olongapo City, Aurora, Abra, Baguio City, Cebu, Bohol, Davao, Zamboanga and Cotabato. Conversations focused on the gains made by the women's movement, the challenges the movement now faces and future recommendations. These have been summarised in the following Feminist Agenda:

Feminist Agenda

Women leaders who were interviewed as part of this project made the following suggestions for Filipino women activists and the movements:

- > Organize: go back to the basics of consciousness-raising, building and consolidating a mass base, and developing new leaders and second liners
- > Recognize and harness contributions of all formations and sectors in the struggle for women's empowerment: the guiding principle should be inclusion rather than exclusion, without losing sight that women themselves must be empowered to undertake their own liberation
- > Draft a comprehensive women's agenda: sharpen analysis to reflect the complexity of the globalized realities within local spaces
- > Lobby for the integration of a women's agenda in electoral politics: constituency building. Creation of a women's vote is important, but help candidates and elected officials draft and/or implement gender-responsive programs
- > Develop knowledge and skills to engage electoral politics and the bureaucracy: being clear of the agenda is not enough. Women must know the ropes of the arena they are getting into, whether as candidates, politicians, or advocates working outside the system. Building a political machinery is necessary
- > Demand accountability: especially cited was the creation of a budget watch in general or specific to the allocation and use of the GAD budget
- > Critical collaboration and sustained engagement with various stakeholders: this includes the State and its agencies, religious and private institutions
- > Document women's experiences, contributions and lessons in the struggle for women's empowerment

¹ Aida F. Santos-Maranan and Nancy Endrinal Parreño wrote the main report, with Alinaya Fabros of IPD contributing to various sections. Ma. Dolores Alicias and Tessa Agravante of IPD gave inputs to the report. Ma. Teresa O. Parel copy edited the report. The WEDPRO research team is composed of Edna de la Cruz, Eva Callueng, Pauline S. Hortelano, Lolita Santos and Rhodora May Sumaray, who assisted in data gathering and the documentation of the Conversations. We would like to especially mention Prof. Edna Co of the University of the Philippines and Ateneo de Manila University, who contributed her expertise in politics and governance to the crucial reflection sessions. This report is shaped by the contributions of all the participants in the conversations, and the authors are greatly indebted to them.

2 Reviewing the Past: Legacy of Women's Struggles

There has been increased interest in women's movements in recent years. However, the singularity of the women's movement – as it was conceptualized in the 1970s and as a result of women's engagements in the anti-Marcos years – has been redefined here, as women's movements, rather than a unified women's movement, so moving away from traditional monolithic conceptions and practice among those active in groups, organizations and institutions that promote women's empowerment.

This renewed attention to women's organizing can be linked to a growing realization of its unique location within social movements, in particular the critical and potent role it can play in political and social projects, in revitalizing social movements, and in deepening democracy in society at large. This project revealed at least two related reasons behind such a role.

First, the women's movement(s) forwards an encompassing conception of political engagement that spans "the personal and the political," which confronts the question of power in both the reproductive and the productive spheres, underscoring the need to intervene in private and public arenas of political contention.

Second, the women's movement(s) *cuts across* and straddles various social movements, political blocs, sector-based organizations and ideological formations. As such, the women's movement(s) is able to capture a wide range of issues and struggles, which makes it well placed, theoretically speaking, to generate a sharper, more textured view of power inequalities and present a more comprehensive, holistic and inclusive framing of progressive political projects.

In this respect, the women's movement(s) has the potential to become a pivotal force for democratic deepening and transformative politics, which will be significant not only

within social movements but also, more importantly, in society at large. However, alongside such recognition is a need for a critical reflection on, for example, the kinds of political projects that can be agreed on.

Given the divergent views and voices emerging from the women's movement(s), this paper hopes to contribute to the reinvigoration of the movement(s) by facilitating a process of collective reflection. This, hopefully, can contribute to the

- (a) identification of the divisions within the women's movement(s) and how such divisions can be addressed; and
- (b) identification of possible mechanisms for a post-martial law theoretical discourse on women's empowerment that can meaningfully push forward women's agenda in politics and gender-responsive governance.

Feminist scholarship in the country has contributed much to the documentation of women's evolving role in society and their contributions to nation building. In the pre-colonial period, *babaylans* (indigenous Filipino religious leader, who functions as a healer) and *catalonans* (priest or priestess of the old Tagalog animistic religion who were either female, or male transvestites) were not only cultural and spiritual leaders, they were also influential in the political and economic life of their communities. The periods of Spanish, American and Japanese colonization are also full of examples of women leaders and revolutionaries. By 1937, women had already won the right to suffrage after years of struggle. Though short-lived, an all-women's political party was established in the 1930s.

Women's participation in the communities and national scene was not only through public leadership. Beginning with the initial efforts during colonial times and up to the post-independence period in the mid- to late 1940s, women played a key

role in many aspects of public life. To date, in the electoral arena, women continue to be active campaigners and poll watchers, even as they remain marginalized in terms of actual decision-making positions. In many cases, women form the backbone of formations as members or volunteers, particularly at the community level. There are numerous examples of this point: barangay health workers, churchwomen, community mobilizers, members of people's organizations and civic organizations – over and above their traditional roles as domestic managers/ housekeepers, caregivers, and even as they engage in productive labor outside the domestic sphere.

While the history of the women's movement(s) can be traced as far back as the Philippine Revolution and the Suffragist Movement, feminist discourses began to be more sharply articulated with the emergence of women's formations, such as the *Malayang Kilusan ng Kababaihan* (Free Movement of Women) or MAKIBAKA (1969), *Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina* (League of New Filipina) or KaBaPa (1974), PILIPINA (1981), *Katipunan ng Kababaihan para sa Kalayaan* (League of Women for Liberation) or KALAYAAN (1983), and GABRIELA (1984). These formations stood out with their attempts to expand the scope of social movements, emphasize the equal importance of women's liberation struggles, and transcend the primacy of class in progressive discourse.

The articulation of a distinct women's perspective in social movements, particularly of the Left, had emerged from the actual engagements of key leaders and articulators with radical social movements, such as the old Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), the social democratic and national democratic movements. Through the years, however, the divide between class and feminism remains a contentious point for many of these formations.

The story of KaBaPa illustrates the point about the nexus of social movements and women's

organizing. Its charter members were part of the defunct *Samahan ng Progresibong Kababaihan* (League of Progressive Women) founded in 1970. KaBaPa leaders were former members of the Huk movement and the old PKP, a communist-leaning organization.² KaBaPa's mass members came mostly from the peasant and urban poor workers sectors. Many of them were relatives of male members who belonged to the peasant organization *Aniban ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura*, or AMA (Organization of Agricultural Workers). KaBaPa's basic thrusts were the education of grassroots women, training them on how to become good community leaders and organizers and how to manage cooperatives and other livelihood projects for women.³

² PKP was eventually "pardoned" and recognized by the Marcos government as a legitimate political organization after a series of political negotiations.

³ Angeles, 1989.

3 The Marcos Years

The Marcos government, realizing the vast potential that Filipino women held in terms of public influence, also promoted the organizing of women's groups. One of the key groups established was the *Kabuhayan at Kaunlaran* (Livelihood and Development) and its counterpart for women, the *Balikatan sa Kaunlaran* or BSK.⁴ The BSK was dominantly composed of women from rich families and had a quasi-political nature due to its leaders being mostly composed of the wives of government officials and notable businessmen, professional women and other social elites. BSK engaged primarily in income-generating projects showcasing the government's livelihood programs, and cleanliness and sanitation projects. It faded away in 1986 with the end of the Marcos regime.

To widen its political base the Government also supported the formation of other women's groups, notably the Rural Improvement Clubs (RICs) and Mothers' Clubs, through its female agricultural extension workers, also called Home Management Technicians (HMTs). Most of the programs of these groups related to the traditional roles of women as domestic managers or caregivers. More ideologically-inclined women's groups saw these as merely reinforcing the domestic functions of rural women, rather than promoting their roles as farmers and entrepreneurs, and whose skills could be honed in extension service and technical training just like men.⁵

During the Marcos years, some women attempted to engage in mainstream politics. The National Organization of Women (NOW), organized in 1980, intended mainly to politicize women through understanding the workings of the parliamentary process. NOW gave primary attention to the government's call for national reconciliation, clean and honest elections, constitutional amendment,

amnesty for all political detainees and the return to civilian rule. NOW was composed primarily of women politicians, wives of traditional politicians and middle-class supporters of traditional opposition groups, particularly UNIDO, a political party. It also counted as members the mass base of UNIDO supporters in some communities and urban poor groups and the domestic helpers of its leaders.⁶

The Marcos years dramatically changed the options for many women activists, particularly those who were involved in the youth movement, labor sector, church sector and those in the academe who were not left untouched by the authoritarian and fascist nature of the martial law years. Women actively participated in protest actions against the Marcos dictatorship, some joined underground movements. Given that the national democratic movement, and its allied organizations such as the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), was then the largest and most effective opposition to the Marcos government, many women joined these organizations. Although the main call was for national liberation, slowly women also began to organize themselves around women-specific issues. It was, to a large degree, psychologically and politically burdensome, as this was frowned upon. Women activists saw the realities of patriarchal structures and ways even within their own revolutionary organizations.

4 The root word "*balikat*" means shoulder; "*kabalikat*" means partner; roughly translated as Shoulder-to-Shoulder or Partnership for Development.

5 Angeles, 1989.

6 Ibid.

4 The Post-Marcos Era

The post-dictatorship years were a fertile ground for women's movements and organizations to flourish as larger spaces were created for women's participation in local and national politics. KAIBA, an all-women's party, was formed in 1986. Although it was short-lived, it is a historically important formation because it was the very first attempt, in a highly male-dominated political arena, to establish an all-women's political party, for women's direct and active participation in governance, and to advocate for a clear and sharply articulated women's political agenda.⁷ It was KAIBA's vision that may well have served as inspiration to later formations such as Abanse! Pinay and Gabriela Women's Party.

The early to mid-1990s was also marked with significant achievements at the policy level for women. Republic Act (R.A.) 7192 or the Women in Nation Building Act provided the legal basis for equal opportunity for women and men in political and civic life. It also laid the foundation for the establishment of a Gender and Development (GAD) Budget to address gender inequality within the bureaucracy and its programs and services. While there are gaps in the implementation of the GAD mainstreaming policy, it is generally acknowledged that the GAD policy provides the frame in which women in particular could demand accountability from the state.

The lobby for gender-responsive governance helped give birth to the Philippine Development Plan for Women (PDPW), the document that articulated the need for development programs to take heed of women's concerns and brought gender into the policy arena. Other key documents followed, such as the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD) 1995–2025. Key players in the development of the PDPW noted that women's groups were involved in the creation of the Plan through various consultative meetings that were conducted by the National Commission on

the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW). Despite these collaborative efforts between women's groups and government, many women remain critical of the government's GAD mainstreaming efforts.⁸

Women's political participation was also expanded, at least conceptually, by the passage in 1991 of the Local Government Code. The Code is regarded as having paved the way for an officially endorsed mechanism for women's participation at the local level. (See Annex 2 – List of Philippine Laws in Support of Women's and Their Children's Welfare and Rights)

These are significant gains for women in the country, despite major issues in the implementation processes. As scholars and activists noted, any advancement with regard to gender equality and women's human rights is firmly rooted in its broader context, i.e., national economic, political and social development.

⁷ KAIBA needs a separate study altogether, given its historical importance in the women's movement.

⁸ The report from a collaborative project of WEDPRO and IPD, "Citizen Participation in Local Governance: Scanning Paper on Women in Politics" (2007), discusses more extensively some assessment points on gender and development mainstreaming.

5 Women's Struggles for Autonomy



Women formations beginning in the late 70s and 80s began asserting a new frame of politics that highlighted the multiple dimensions of power and oppression, including contestation in body politics and self-determination alongside class, nationalist and anti-imperialist struggles.

MAKIBAKA began to articulate the concept of clan and family as two arenas that women needed to examine as the sites of their oppression. But at the same time it posited the view that the same arenas could also be sites for their liberation. This emerging discourse would be cut short in the open arena of activism when MAKIBAKA was completely forced to go underground in 1972 upon the declaration of martial law.⁹

⁹ MAKIBAKA would later re-emerge as an underground organization under the umbrella of the National Democratic Front (NDF), and much later, would incorporate feminist articulations in their political documents. An unfinished study started in mid-2000 on MAKIBAKA and other women's groups has been initiated and shelved, for various reasons, by KALAYAAN.

Two organizations stood out with their strong and highly visible feminist agenda: PILIPINA (founded in 1981) and KALAYAAN (founded in 1983). These two formations emerged from different ideological moorings – socialist democratic ideals for PILIPINA and a national democratic perspective for KALAYAAN. Even as some of their members had come from various political positions but converged in their feminist politics and vision, these two formations through time would be identified along these different ideological lines.

The majority of KALAYAAN founders had strong affiliations if not actual political work with the national democratic movement both in its legal and underground segments; many were seasoned national democratic activists. KALAYAAN's autonomous stance, i.e., insisting on its feminist agenda using women's lens in the existing natdem discourse and analysis, and resisting the national democratic movement's demand for organizational

centralism, opened it to severe criticisms from national democratic hardliners. Hardliners frowned on KALAYAAN's major call, "*Kalayaan ng bayan, kalayaan ng kababaihan, sabay nating ipaglaban!*" – that people's liberation and women's liberation should be fought for side by side.

► *This call openly signaled the birthing of a feminist perspective in the national democratic stream. It was, to a large degree, a turning away from the primacy of class struggle, and a broadening and deepening of the Marxist/socialist perspective. KALAYAAN further called for the establishment of an autonomous women's movement within the national democratic agenda, and itself "feminist".*¹⁰ ◀

KALAYAAN also popularized back in the early 1980s the slogan "women's rights are human rights," something unheard of in those days in social movements. It was no surprise then to KALAYAAN that it was eventually identified in some natdem circles as being "soc-dem" (short for socialist democrat).¹¹ PILIPINA, founded by social development advocates, on the other hand envisioned a "Philippine society where women possess dignity, autonomy, and equality."¹²

The emergence of the women's movement was prompted by a need to respond to and distinguish itself from a progressive line which relegated women's issues to the back burner of the national liberation project, making it, as in many other countries, subordinate to and conditional on class liberation'.¹³ The emphasis on autonomy stems from its insistence that "dictates from leftist male leaders had debilitating effects on women and women's movements."¹⁴

Given this trajectory, the struggle for "autonomy" has always been at the core of the women's movements. In a sense, the assertion of women's liberation and self-determination coincided with a struggle to break away from the domination of the male-led party discourse and structure. The early years of GABRIELA, for example, saw the inclusion of women along with class issues as both a framework for organizing and for advocacy. PILIPINA, on the other hand, has always seen development work as an arena for its advocacy, where the private issues of women intersected with the public realm.

In this respect, the assertion of a distinct feminist agenda integral to national liberation was a response to the limitation of prevailing tendencies and perspectives within male-dominated social movements. Past assertions were echoed in the more recent reflections:

► *For a women's movement to really thrive there needs to be a structure for and of committed women to see through education, organizing, governance, the people making policies. Without those, it's difficult to hope that our women would become strong.*¹⁵ ◀

Although there have been advances in pushing for policy reforms including legislation that is responsive to women's concerns (i.e., violence against women, trafficking, sexual harassment, gender budget) the women's agenda remains on the fringes of mainstream political engagements. Women's issues are still viewed as secondary and the women's perspective as divisive. The dichotomy between the personal and the political persists. "Gender" is still an alien concept to many, including educated women.

¹⁰ Angeles, 1989.

¹¹ KALAYAAN was criticized as western, bourgeois, middle-class bra-burning feminists. As the history of the Left in the country suggests, to be called "soc-dem" was not exactly an acceptable political position for hardline "natdems," most especially during those years.

¹² A case study of Abanse! Pinay, the legislative arm of PILIPINA, is included in the following section of the present report.

¹³ Naciri, 1998: 8

¹⁴ Estrada-Claudio and Santos, 2005

¹⁵ The transcripts of the conversations were edited for clarity; when the participants spoke in Filipino or Tagalog, these were translated and in some instances paraphrased for the purpose of brevity, without losing the main points. Most of the sources of quoted sections are cited anonymously.

6 Mapping identities and initiatives: where are the women?

Many of the women interviewed acknowledged that younger women and men have not been touched by many of the issues that many organized groups and the social movements have been articulating and protesting against, even dying for in some instances. Perhaps, they said, the younger generation has their own ways of reckoning with the socio-political issues. Let's not give up on them, one said. There is a need to connect, many insisted, to those we have not yet reached, because younger women are finding their own niche. Their struggles are being framed differently from their foremothers, taking on shapes and directions that are contextualized in their own experiences.

Yet, without doubt, women are everywhere, from the remote *barangays* of Abra and Zamboanga to the air-conditioned rooms of the corporate world to the palace along the Pasig. The majority of Filipino women, sadly, are yet to be organized. In the main, if women are in organized groups, they are found predominantly in church-related organizations such as the Catholic Women's League, mothers clubs in municipalities, and for the middle class, in civic organizations such as Soroptimists. But women form the bulk of community workers doing all sorts of tasks including being *barangay tanod*, street sweepers, street vendors, churchgoers and electoral volunteers.

▶ *They participate in the education of their children. They are the ones who sit in on PTA [meetings]. They participate in decisions that have to do with health, the beautification of their community, and church matters.* ◀

Many of the participants agreed that women and men in social movements should "stop talking to ourselves, to the converts of our causes." For instance, during the

height of the Subic rape case,¹⁶ despite the national import that social movements and women's organizations attached to it and its implications for the nation's sovereignty, it was a source of continuing frustration to see how the general public appeared to be untouched by it.

Within social movements, women's visibility is remarkable. But whether they are in key decision-making bodies is another issue. As an informal mapping exercise, and culled from the experiences of the women who joined in the conversations, the following broad canvas of where women are is offered:

- a) **As individual women claiming their rights** – These women may not be leaders or members of organized groups, but they readily engage institutions in order to access basic services and goods for themselves or their families. The day-to-day community life in effect becomes a training ground for women's empowerment and a starting point for politicization.
- b) **As community advocates** – Women participate in community organizations, as members or leaders, particularly those which have direct relevance to their roles as caregivers of their families. In rural and urbanizing areas, the women are the traditional healers, the *hilot*, and the "nanay" (mother) to children who need mothering.

This includes women or multi-sectoral groups lobbying for access to basic services such as water, electricity and decent housing. Despite the overwhelming problems they face as women, leaders and advocates for social change, their tenacity is a source of pride for urban poor women.

▶ *I am presently a member of Kasama-Pilipina. I am a single parent and a simple*

¹⁶ The Subic rape case involved "Nicole," a young Filipina, who was raped by an American marine, while the latter's companions, also US military personnel, looked on.

housewife. I have three children, and lost one. My two children have already graduated. It was Edwin Nakpil who developed me in community [work], in the urban poor [community] where I am from. We live in North Triangle. Our struggle in North Triangle [for housing rights] is on its 16th year, which started in 1991. I am also the president of the organization of organized women in our community and our actual membership is more than 300 in North Triangle. At present we are also organizing Kasama-Pilipina at NCR, hopefully towards a national organization. ◀

A woman leader in Abra related how the rice mill she was able to get from the church helped women to be more active in barangay meetings. Originally, the rice mill was intended to ease women's work so they could attend church services on time.

Being in organized groups has also helped women gain new knowledge, and to poor women this is one of the more enduring benefits of their involvement.

▶ *I've learned a lot from joining women's groups. If not for this experience, I wouldn't be here and I wouldn't have met all of you... I'm here because I want to gain more knowledge that I can share with the community. There are a lot of battered women there. It's in the urban poor community where you can see the many situations of women that need attention. Being poor, we often don't have the capacity to share this knowledge with them. Our lives revolve around our most pressing issue – the security of our housing hangs over our heads. The World Bank is now eyeing our area in Central District. Our situation is critical. Even so, we have united with the struggle for women. I hope to learn a lot from this, and I'd like to invite you to our community so that you can see the real situation of the urban poor, not only in our place but in other communities which we also want to protect. But we don't have enough resources, such as*

skilled persons who can help us explain our situations. ◀

c) **As citizen watchdogs** – Political consciousness seeps through even in unlikely spaces such as church-based groups. In Abra, women form the backbone of the campaign for clean elections through their involvement in the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) and NAMFREL.

▶ *CCAGG started as a result of the 1986 elections... we had a bicycle brigade made up of children who were in elementary... now when we see them, they're already grown, they're already graduates, they're progressives because they became involved when they were still young... that's why I am so happy with what we went through, especially when we see our companions then who have become progressives. I'm retired but I haven't stopped working. I'm tied up with the municipalities in the highlands...*

So, if you ask us to assess the involvement of women, almost all our groups are women... and for those in politics and for those who enter politics, we look at their records, their character, and of course their morality... about jueteng in Bangued; in some towns in Abra they have jueteng... How much does the government get from jueteng? One million a month?... That's people's money. We should be models in politics, in our morality, in our character, [be] anti-gambling, pro poor. ◀

d) **As members of political blocs and social movements** – Some of these groups are members of political blocs and parties such as Akbayan! and Laban ng Masa. There are women who are in social movements. Thus stronger links between local and national/international politics are made.

▶ *Here in Aurora, women tried to get involved, but they felt out of place when it came to politics. But slowly, they are beginning to participate in politics, and*

as a matter of fact some of our councilors are women. If there are eight councilors, at least two or three of them are women, even at the barangay [level]. Of course men still outnumber women, but at least we have women councilors now... before women seemed to be just for the home but now they are becoming more aware. ◀

e) **As political and cultural leaders** – Women and their contributions to development are more visible at the community level and this paves the way for their participation in formal avenues of political power such as the local government. In addition to this, the presence of a strong women's movement in an area also facilitates and strengthens women's participation in traditionally all-male domains such as community justice mechanisms.

▶ *We can see in the Philippines that there are an increasing number of women participating at the provincial up to the national levels. I think there are more women aspiring to become active in the political arena. The problems are the limited opportunities and spaces given to them. But compared to say 25 years ago, the situation has changed, because we now see more women engaged in politics.* ◀

In Abra, women form part of the council of elders; among the Taduras in Cotabato there are also the *pintaylan* (female tribal judges).

In other areas such as Cordillera, gender perspectives are also slowly being integrated into tribal justice systems. Traditional community practices such as bride price are lessened or stopped altogether in areas where women's human rights groups are active.

▶ *In my view, what could significantly bring about change is that when you organize a community, you can also develop a leader. In the Cordillera, for example, there is still the bride price. But in communities where women's organizations are strong, that has disappeared. It was the women in the*

communities themselves who asserted that this was not a good thing and that it should be changed. Certain developments also give us hope that we can soon change aspects of the indigenous culture that are disrespectful to women, that do not accord them dignity and equal rights as members of the community. ◀

Indigenous women are not only marginalized as women, they also suffer the biases that their ethnicity brings along. An indigenous participant said:

▶ *They're still at a stage where they are still struggling to be heard. There are indigenous communities that are very patriarchal; there are also some that are egalitarian in some ways. Women need to be given respect; they should also be allowed to acquire leadership positions, to have a say over what's happening in their communities. What is good is that there are women's organizations – we give a lot of training to our indigenous counterparts in Mindanao and Mindoro, for example. Slowly women are becoming empowered and at the same time men are also being educated.* ◀

Sometimes, because women in the non-indigenous areas are often more visible than their indigenous sisters, there is a tendency to view women's participation in politics and governance as merely a function of organizing and education. Class and ethnicity are important factors that should be considered:

▶ *What is often highlighted is men's role in politics. For example, national elections seems to be a male domain. Women are in the house, cooking, taking care of the children. Even if they have roles in the community, these are merely extensions of the home – day care, health care. Men dominate even in traditional communities, in the indigenous forms of politics, in the council of leaders.* ◀

The women from Abra were clear in acknowledging that their religious affiliation

was a factor that bound them together. Their focus is the family – addressing children’s issues, violence within the home, their work in the parishes (e.g., feeding programs), even the Girl Scouts. Since there is a lack of women’s groups in the area, to them the Girl’s Scouts constitutes a movement. The expression of their activism is in being watchdogs during elections and in other governance issues such as ensuring that local projects are implemented with transparency. From the conversations, it was clear that they were able to use their being women to their advantage, as they felt that they would be less harassed than men.

▶ *Our mayors are political opponents... all we can think to do is to simply pray and say the rosary. That’s what we’ll do if [there is violence]. We’re not going to go to the precincts anymore. We’ll just say the rosary and pray that nothing bad happens.* ◀

While the women of Abra appear to be solid in the work that they do, it is clear that their influence remains within the confines of the church, school activities and family affairs.

On the other hand, others more readily see the value of engaging local government units as these have both executive and legislative powers, instead of national government institutions that are primarily concerned with the creation of policies and standards. Almost all the women in the conversations agreed that significant gains have already been made at the policy level (in fact, several women averred that it is within policy making where the impact of the women’s movement is most clearly manifested); the challenge now is how to ensure that these policies are implemented. Strengthening the gains achieved at the national level at the local level is a critical work of grassroots women leaders.

Trinidad (Ka Trining) Domingo of the *Pambansang Kongreso ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan* (PKKK) or Rural Women’s Congress and a founding member of the KaBaPa, has acted out on her advocacies at different levels.

▶ *I can see that the struggles of our colleagues in Congress can get pretty difficult, and even if we say that they were elected because they were personalities of the party list, their work is still difficult. The role of PKKK in relation to what our friends in the party list groups [do], is to give orientation to those who live in remote areas. We should support each other. Whatever level you’re in, just do your work and don’t worry because there are those in the provinces [who would help you]. I was also a commissioner of the NCRFW representing peasant women.* ◀

7 Women Define Women's Movements

▶ *I see women's liberation as a very political question. We speak about liberation because we find ourselves in a state [of marginalization]. If sisterhood were the only issue in the women's movement, the politics of our struggle would not be rooted.* ◀

Defining the women's movement is very much a question of who is defining it, especially in the context of its origins and ideological rootedness, including possible biases against women and the actions they undertake autonomously for their own empowerment. Women who were directly part of the long and arduous struggle to even conceive the possibility of an autonomous women's movement took the road that was not popular even within the Left.

▶ *The progressive women's movement in the Philippines was born within the left political tradition. The left historical origins of the women's movement had determined to a great extent the contours of the discourse on the woman question in the Philippines. In other words, the women's movement's analysis of the woman question in the Philippine context as well as its politics was developed within the matrix of the nationalist movement to which the women's movement is inextricably linked. It was this superimposition of the historical origins of the women's movement and the overall left political debate, which had nurtured the uneven development of the women's movement's feminist theory and practice.*¹⁷ ◀

When the nationalist movement fought as a kind of united front against the dictatorship of Marcos, the unities among women's groups were a necessary component of this singleminded goal to oust the dictatorship. But each segment of the broad nationalist, anti-Marcos front had its own conception

of how women activists could support the struggle.

▶ *This uneven development of the women's movement's theoretical understanding of the woman question was clearly reflected in its political practice and relationship with heterogeneous sectoral organizations and the nationalist movement as a whole, which has been changing through time. The unevenness of this development was due to a host of factors internal and external to the women's movement. The internal factors were (1) the varying degrees of political and feminist consciousness among the women active in the movement, and (2) the differing ideological tendencies among the various women's group formation. The external factors were (1) the variety of ideological tendencies and tradition within the Philippine left movement itself, and (2) the specific political conjuncture that shaped the direction of both the nationalist movement and the women's movement.*¹⁸ ◀

Given these factors, it is not a surprise that this unevenness, layered over by differing ideological perspectives and analyses of Philippine society, has continued to this day. The national democratic Left had so enveloped and shaped the rise and fall of women's formations, that when the fundamental split happened in the early 1990s, women's organizations underwent ideological shifts as well, splitting into several factions within their main political organizations. It is no wonder why some sections of social movements perceive the women's movement as weak and fragmented. "Why should anyone be surprised with the fragmentation among women?" a participant asked rhetorically. "*Nag-away ang mga tatay, syempre affected ang mga anak!*" (The fathers were quarreling, so of course the children were affected!) "If women are fragmented, it is because men fragmented our causes!"

¹⁷ Angeles, 1989: 363

¹⁸ Ibid.

In light of the continuing fractiousness of the Left, a number of women moved away from what has been called the “larger movement” precisely because they felt that they did not want to be intimately and directly involved with the factionalism of the dominant Left. They charted their own agenda, created their own spaces and claimed these spaces as their safe haven away from the meddling of the male leaders who had in the first place doubted the political logic and ideological correctness of having a women’s movement that had a feminist agenda. This moving away has been perceived by some as a “de-politicization” of the women’s agenda and consequently of the women’s movement. A woman leader said:

- ▶ *When you have so little energy left as a result of the long years of struggle, when your domestic situation changes over time, and in my case, I have children to take care of, when you need to begin to worry about your financial needs, and then have to continue your activism, being in social movements that keep fighting with each other was simply a bit too much, in light of many things that needed my attention as a woman, mother, wife, organizer, activist, etc. The movement then was my safe haven, comrades were my best friends – now you don’t know who are really your friends and your enemies. Before, to me, the “enemy” was clear – the anti-people institutions and policies.* ◀

Since the splits in the 1990s, there has been a rethinking on many issues about and within the social movements. One issue is the impact of the fragmentations that has obviously weakened not only the various sections of the Left but also the women’s movements.

That the women’s movement is weak is an assertion that is saddled with expectations. The women’s movement, according to a Conversation participant, is said to have failed to:

- ▶ *Consolidate a constituency because of its sporadic and sparse organizing and it has*

a low capacity to permeate the discourses of the wider social movements, in effect resulting in the marginalization of the women’s agenda. The marginalization of this agenda is shown in the divisions within the once solid, one-center women’s movement of the national democratic movement. ◀

Another participant said:

- ▶ *Women dispersed across different formations, sectors and blocs, making it difficult to locate and distinguish a discrete formation that may be considered as the women’s movement. In fact, one key insight looks at how women have been mobilized into sectors and blocs, underscoring the absence of a deliberate and sustained organizing effort that uses women identity as a frame. Instead, women in movements today are being organized as peasants, fisherfolk, urban poor, worker, and so forth.* ◀

Organizing within the Left has traditionally been and continues to be along sectoral groups – labor/workers, peasant, indigenous, Moro people, church people/religious, to mention the most significant sectors. The women’s movement in its early years was also organized along sectoral formations, and often within the influence of bigger formations.

In the early years of the women’s movement, women asserted that issue-based organizing was a necessary strategy since women’s issues cut across classes. The preponderance of women’s groups that are issue-focused is a clear example of this: along reproductive health/rights, violence against women, prostitution, trafficking, migration, lesbian issues, etc. Within other sections of the broad social movement(s), there are issue-based organizations carrying human rights, anti-war/peace issues, among others.

Issue-based organizing was a result of the changes. The assertion that the women’s

agenda is dichotomized and de-politicized needs to be examined.

Women activists who were involved in social movements in the martial law years were particularly reflective of the unity versus diversity of the women's movements. Very marked were the changes in the political and social landscapes in which the women's movement is now situated. When before there was a real need to unite in a broad anti-fascist/anti-authoritarian movement, the re-institution of democratic institutions after 1986 opened new avenues for other advocacies, including human rights and its practice within the Left. Strategies necessarily changed, and it is in this area that there are distinctly divergent views and practices. After decades of struggle for empowerment and having been a part of the anti-dictatorship movement, the Philippine women's movement(s) today finds itself in a state of disorientation.

This disorientation is shared by other sections of the broad social movements. The progressive movements have generally accepted that the disorientation is largely a result of the fragmentation of the Left, the shifts in analysis not only of Philippine society but of the strategies needed in a post-dictatorship era. Those issues however, are not dealt with in this paper. The controversies surrounding those issues need another major study.

Some quarters believe that the women's movement – understood and perceived in the past to be one united front – has become weak, divided, fragmented and de-politicized. This assertion posits that the transformative potential of a participatory project can only be realized if it is tied to a broader but collective political project of social justice and social change. This position argues that women's participation can only make sense if women's issues and agenda are tied to a broader political project and carried into the political process. However, with a disoriented

women's movement, a meaningful "women in politics" intervention would be hard to push.

Others believe that in many cases, the gender policies and programs that the government has established fall short of thoroughly challenging the power structures that perpetuate gender inequality, such as the exclusion of women from many areas particularly in the public realm. Many activists refer to this as the depoliticization of the gender empowerment framework. This perception lingers despite the fact that women's organized activism and interventions have significantly contributed to the gender and development mainstreaming policy, specifically the Philippine Plan for Women, twin to the Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP).

The conversations attempted to find clues if not answers to some questions:

- > What are the gaps in terms of structures and mechanisms for women's mobilization, especially among the strictly women's organizations and formations?
- > Is there a need to re-invigorate the women's movement with other political center(s) for women's organizing, say another organizational structure through which such gaps could be addressed? Observations regarding the apparent lack of a "women's center" that is more inclusive of different political persuasions that would direct the women's movement have also been forwarded.
- > Is it true that the work of "organizing" has been glaringly limited if not completely abandoned by women's groups and feminist organizations?

Central therefore to the issue of re-invigorating the women's movement is the question of what is the women's agenda? A related question is, who sets the women's agenda?

Questions such as "*May women's movement pa ba?*" provoked responses like: "There is

no movement, only NGOs.”¹⁹ Such responses may be contextualized within a conjuncture that is referred to in the literature as the “NGO-isation of feminism”²⁰ referring “to the evolution of a feminist movement of professionals that since the 1995 UN Beijing Conference has come to rely heavily on urban educated women,” donor funds, and international debates rather than on women in movements, grassroots communities and local articulation of everyday experiences

This perceived shift from “movements” to “NGOs” has implications regarding the direction and discourse of the movement. Some women and men who belong to mixed social movements, party formations or political blocs tend to see all-women groups, whether NGOs or people’s organizations, as being de-linked from the “broader” national struggles, for example, political engagements in the way that dominant discourses about politics have been framed. They tend to view this as a disconnection from the more meaningful social struggles, i.e., “national in scope,” as some are wont to say.

Some note that the NGO-isation of the women’s movement(s) in essence, the combined consequence of “disconnecting” from women in other social movements, the reliance on donor funds, the absence of organizing work, may have cost the women’s movement its radical vision and political edge, which in the end could hamper the articulation and development of a sustained feminist political project. Women’s liberation and women’s empowerment, according to this argument, have been watered down to gender, in the same way that reproductive

rights and reproductive self-determination have become reproductive health.

▶ *There are concerns raised about our women’s liberation movement, which has taken on [the character of] being NGO. The primary critique is that it has become project driven, dependent on funding. And the funds come from external sources. It’s now international agencies that are determining our agenda as women who are mobilizing in the Philippines. We need to ask ourselves, to what extent we are really autonomous in creating our agenda for women in the Philippines?*

When we say we have angst about the women’s movement, we are really referring to the women’s NGOs which now seem to be project-based and fund driven. When there’s no more funding for a particular line or direction or the project is finished, then all we can do is move on to the next [project]. Our question is, what about our visioning? You have a vision of what you want to happen to women’s empowerment but there are no funds for that, and so you move on to another track. Often you merely insert your vision into your project. ◀

This “angst” has reportedly left a bad impression on some communities of women, particularly younger women, prompting some to distance themselves and/or completely disengage from the movement. Further, the shift from movement to NGOs, coupled with the perceivable de-linking of NGOs from movements and vice versa, has heightened the tendency to become fund-driven, to limit one’s intervention to “small” projects directed by donors, and to lose sight of longer term “visions” that could serve as a consolidating collective framework for the women’s projects. There is a discursive gap within the women’s movements, that is, the absence of a shared language that can draw in communities and formations that ought to be ready constituencies of the women’s movement.

¹⁹ According to a study, “NGOs should not be interchanged with civil society or social movements. In the 1970s and 1980s, NGOs were referred to as support institutions because they were supporting mass-based movements. When globalization dominated social discourse, the term civil society gained currency. The name was adopted to signify that NGOs no longer support institutions of mass movements.” There is also a distinction made between civil society and civil-society organizations, CSOs are discrete expressions of the term “civil society.” From “Global Civil Society Movements in the Search for Alternatives,” *Anib* (issue no.3 October 2006): 44.

²⁰ Tripp, 2003:248

A veteran feminist advocate who joined the underground movement is much more critical of the lifestyles and career orientation of some women leaders:

▶ *My observation is that there are many initiatives for women and by women. It is not necessarily a unified women's movement; of course, the reason why it is not unified is because of political agenda. One of the few things that distress me, I'm very sorry to say, [is] that many women advocates are not really women advocates. In other words... this is for them to have a career, [to] land a post [at] the UN, [to] get a project plan, to attend conferences, to travel... I know many women's advocates do nothing but attend conferences.*

I think in certain cases, when the chips are down, if you are a career advocate, you may not advocate for women because you want to protect your career – there are so many of those around. For example, we need to focus on civil rights or human rights which are women human rights issues. Gender mainstreaming is very good but it is a secondary problem. But the main problem is we don't have livelihood, economic power, water sanitation services, education, etc. Women are the most insecure in society. If, for example, the husband is a contractualized worker, the wife's economic situation is also insecure, and therefore she has to be the one to fill in the gaps in their economic situation.

It's a reflection of political divisions and also it's careerism. There are a lot of super-duper women who will say they have arrived from abroad. [But] what did they do there? They are deans, they are people we look up to. ◀

Others believe that women are not visible in broader politics because some have opted to be involved in much more direct, much more meaningful interventions for women and their communities. However, some feminist leaders argue that there are organizing and mobilizations being done.

▶ *What is disconcerting perhaps for some in the mixed social movements is that women are not linked directly, organizationally and structurally speaking, to them. The focus is the women in our communities, to which we direct our services, programs and advocacies. Don't other social movements rely on some funds from donors as well? Women after all are the poorest of the poor, the most violated in terms of their rights, the most marginal in terms of their voices and actions.* ◀

The conversations provide a glimpse of some consequences of what is perceived to be a "disjointed, divided, disconnected and de-politicized" women's movement, as well as the interplay among these conditions, that in part explains the weakening and fragmentation of the women's movement. The lack of any conscious and sustained effort to mobilize women has left the task of organizing to sectoral and ideological movements that have not ensured that the women's agenda is infused into their agenda in a strategic and programmatic manner.

Women in these movements primarily identify with their sectors or ideological blocs, and some regard the "women question" as a secondary and marginal struggle. With the limited interaction and exchange, that is the disconnection between women's movements and women in movements, the political and discursive space of these formations become constricted, diminishing their capacity to generate a sharper, more comprehensive agenda that encompasses the different dimensions of the women's as well as the overall progressive struggle. It seems necessary, therefore, that the process of articulating and sharpening such an agenda can only be set in motion and actualized through the dynamic interaction and cross-fertilization of these two bodies of discourse and praxis.

Conversation participants insisted that the dichotomies between the reproductive and productive, the private and the public realms

of political engagement are a reality that needs to be addressed.

▶ *Women who work for the poor and women who work for the women's movement are dichotomized or divided. We should work together to address that issue and see how we can harmonize our actions... [for example,] the issue of housing is a very feminist issue. What we lack is a strategy on how we can bring together the issues of repro rights, water and social services. How do you apply reproductive self-determination, the issue of violence, to the issue of services? We don't have a handle on that yet.*

The advocacy for women and the feminization of different issues in society are more closely linked to their lives. They find it easier to articulate and act on these concretely. For me, the key is having a mechanism to address these and continue to give them education and skills training. ◀

Such statements echo the assertions of some feminist groups who insist that the feminist agenda is as valid an agenda as the class agenda, and that the above assertions are not recognizing that the women-focused agenda is as political and ideological as the agenda of other social movements which generally still put a premium on class issues.

The importance of being able to bridge these two currently separate bodies of discourse and praxis is recognized by those who regard such a "bridging framework" as critical in capturing the imagination of various communities of women and harnessing their energies in movements. Looking back, it was noted:

▶ *The women's movement is currently at a low point. Why? Because who is leading the women's movement? Us! And what has happened to us? We went our different ways with our own issues. We became trapped... we think that if we've done GST, that's already fine. We are the ones to blame [for what's happening]*

in the women's movement. We did not go beyond GST. We did not go beyond reproductive self-determination.

It is for us to strive to reach the women who are into reproductive self-determination, which we know is a very fundamental issue, and yet it cannot remain in the reproductive movement. [It must also cross] the bridge into the other movements. It's not yet fertilized; it's only recently being fertilized.

What I'm saying is that the issue of poverty, the issue of sovereignty, have not been tied to the issue of sovereignty of the body, the politics of the body. I'm not saying that I didn't have a hand in that! I'm not saying we can't do anything about that. We can do something to remedy that. What I'm saying is that we need to come out with a women's agenda that deals with politics and governance. What is the agenda that we want to come out with? Violence against women? The five percent GAD budget? Reproductive rights? What I mean is, we have to learn our lessons and make it a productive golden opportunity. ◀

There is a perception that a number of women's organizations and formations have not been able to move beyond their initial work on gender, health and violence, much less weave this work into a comprehensive agenda that is grounded on the multiple struggles that women take on. On the other hand, one could interpret this as a ghettoization of women's issues and thus make it difficult for women in movements to find resonance in a discourse meant to capture their plight and facilitate their empowerment. This current "focus" of the women's movement was determined by and is deeply rooted in the conditions from which it sprang.

We are reacting to a dominant discourse that is patriarchy.

▶ *There was something that [made us] understand the State, and I think we should*

not be apologetic about this. This was a reaction, and that's why, if we want to use that term, we developed the feminist agenda. That evolved, and to a large degree, that's why the issues of violence, repro/sexual rights, development for women, etc., came out, because of that stage. I think that many of us, because of limited energy and capacity, decided to focus on feminist issues... That's why we also have our own dynamism regarding revisioning. I think it was a necessary stage. The challenge is how. ◀

Such a reflection from the women's movement(s) is also percolating in sectoral formations, with similar articulation of what can be conceived as a bridging perspective coming from women in movements.

▶ *My identity is with KaBaPa and we're already 32 years old. With or without funds, we will meet. We will plan how to push forward women's issues, not only those of peasant women but also of the urban poor and overseas workers – all of these, because as a woman you carry all of these. You don't look at these [issues] only for your organization because these are also the people's concerns and [we stand in] solidarity with them.* ◀

It appears that there is a need to find a political **and** organizational **mechanism** by which the dichotomized way of thinking and acting on their issues particularly urban poor women's issues is harnessed as one feminist advocacy. The research acknowledges that the critique is an important one, with respect to the current trajectory of the women's movements, a track that may undermine its ability to autonomously set an agenda as well as carry out and sustain engagements toward this pursuit. There is, undoubtedly, a recognition that the women's agenda needs to be broadened, deepened and re-articulated to encompass the multiple dimensions of the plight of women.

The focus on "typical" women issues is viewed as a necessary stage for a women's

movement that, at the time, was breaking away from and seriously confronting "a very male-dominated discourse." Fast forward to today and one prevailing assessment is that the movement seems to have become stuck on and confined to these issues, which prevents the women's agenda from dynamically evolving. At this juncture, there seems to be a shared sense that critical reflection and "re-visioning" need to be done. But a corollary question can be posited: should not mixed and nationally broad in scope organizations seriously consider the positioning of the feminist agenda in their main programs of actions?

Some groups find themselves revisiting frameworks such as socialist feminism as scaffolding for this "re-visioning." A paper attempting to revisit socialist-feminism states:

Philippine socialist feminists start with certain assumptions. First, that the material base of society is composed of the sphere of production and reproduction. Second, if class theory guides our descriptions of and prescriptions for the productive sphere, then a general theory for sexuality is necessary to describe the reality of reproduction and guide our visions of what it would be like to liberate relations of reproduction. Third, that while we can speak of reproduction and production as if they were separate areas, thus giving rise to the unfortunate term, "dual systems theory," there is in truth only one system which has two facets. Fourth, if reproduction serves as one "leg" of the current social system, then the call for reproductive rights and freedoms is not a call that remains a task for the "smaller" social movement called the women's movement or sector. It is a task central to any effort to end all forms of exploitation and oppression.²¹

If indeed socialist feminism can be the unifying ideology for women in the women's movement(s) and women in other social movements, mixed political blocs or parties,

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there is a need to sharpen the discourse for ideological and political unities among women in women's groups and in mixed organizations.

While there is no consensus yet regarding socialist feminism as a frame, there appears to be one common realization shared by both members of the women's movement and women in other social movements: the importance of grappling with the intersection of class and gender, probing the intricate interconnections of patriarchy, poverty and powerlessness. There is still a lot to be done, but apparently more and more formations seem to be compelled and bent on taking up the challenge.

When asked whether the divisions are real, as other women's organizations feel, GABRIELA acknowledged them:

- ▶ *Regarding the fragmentation, you have to understand it is not only because GABRIELA is bigger, it's not that. There are historical reasons and there have been struggles along that... The differences lie in our different origins... and they're not just at the feeling level. I should be frank that GABRIELA knows who it can deal with, not in a lawyering manner, and I think I can deal with those who are not "kargado" (loaded, in an ideological sense). Sometimes it is much more open to deal with federations – they don't carry anything against you, and you can easily establish unity on several issues.*

But outside Metro Manila, some participants have another sense of what is the current state of the women's movement(s):

- ▶ *When we women advocates in the Visayas come and we hear about the fragmentation in Manila, we say we don't want to be part of that. We don't want to be part of divisive issues. I mean, we come together on issues and we don't allow personal agenda or personalities to intervene. So that is not happening in Bohol. When it comes to a gender issue for women and children*

we are always able to gather the women together, women from different political affiliations, and the ideological lines are blurred.

8 What is the Women's Movement(s)?

There was a tacit agreement amongst the participants on what the women's movement means: at the barest minimum, any group of women coming together to respond to women's issues is already a movement, if not part of the Philippine women's movement(s) – if indeed the different streams can be reduced to a single unified whole. There was also a consensus that “women's issues” are wide and varied. Some would make a distinction between women-specific issues and general issues, thus forwarding the idea that a women's movement is primarily concerned with women-specific issues (e.g., VAW and reproductive health issues). A participant shared:

- ▶ *There are many kinds of organizations and their perspectives vary, and I find this difficult to explain. One concrete example is the case of Nicole. In that issue, there were very clear connections between gender and politics and our sovereignty as a nation. There's this organization [of women who give legal services], and in an interview they were asked what made the Nicole case stand out. One interviewee answered, “There's actually no distinction. In fact we don't understand why so much attention is being given to this case when there are so many other rape cases that have not received as much.” That's what I meant when I said that despite the fact that they belong to the movement and they protest like us and they say they are feminists, yet it's not clear to them what the Nicole case was all about.* ◀

Others see all formations with only women members as already constituting a women's movement, regardless of the issues and concerns they address (e.g. Girl Scouts).

A third idea is that individual or groups of women, as long as they are advocating for women's human rights issues, are part of the women's movement. Women's human rights issues in this regard are more general: a woman may be part of a multi-sectoral group addressing access to basic services, and she is

considered part of the women's movement. A Sarilaya member said:

- ▶ *I can say that there is a women's movement, that's why we are in the struggle. But not everyone has the same level of awareness. There are a great number of women who still live in the old tradition, having grown up [under a system] in which they think they should submit to male authority. That's why we focus on them and are struggling to make them aware that it's time to liberate ourselves and it isn't alright to remain downtrodden – it's not good anymore to believe the old adage that where you fell is where you get up again. You have to get up and not remain where you've fallen. When you get up, go and leave!* ◀

Sarilaya women added another qualifier to the third criteria in that these actions should have a clearly articulated framework in analyzing women's realities and forging strategies. It is on this framework, according to them, where commitment to working for women's empowerment will be based.

- ▶ *We can also ask, do all POs led by women or for women or women's NGOs know that there is a women's movement? Do they feel that they are a part of the women's movement? You can be in a women's group or in a women's NGO, but you don't necessarily have the women's perspective as a movement that you would fight for, struggle for. I think that within the ranks of women's organizations or women's NGOs, roughly only 25 per cent can appreciate the women's movement. It might be that the majority is still issue-based. It might be that within our own groups of women we need to deepen our understanding of the movement. Having a movement is different from simply having an association that's merely anti- or issue-based.* ◀

There was a cynicism among some participants regarding the women's movement(s) – “Bakit, may women's movement ba pa?” (Is there still a women's

movement?). Others were of the opinion that the women's movement lacks a coherent perspective. However, it was clear to almost all participants that this diversity of thinking reflected that there are women's movements, literally in the plural sense, rather than a women's movement. Many considered the movements as vibrant, dynamic and evolving.

Even traditional groups including civic organizations have their own specific contributions to uplifting women's welfare. They may not be directly contributing to changing and uplifting women's role and status in general, they may not be striving to change the inequalities between women and men, but they have made significant gains for the women in their communities, however small or large they deem their communities to be. There are the groups that focus on "clean-and-green" programs, and in a way they contribute to the environment. Some are more comprehensive in their approach to women's issues.

While there have been strong opinions on the divisions existing between these women's movements, others would rather look at the value of a plural and inclusive movement. A participant from the Visayas affirmed that the divisions were not felt strongly in their area:

► *There were several activities like the Contra Cha Cha where we all came together – GABRIELA, WINGS and even the church and Catholic Women's League, you had the Right [all the way] to the Left. So, we [can] come together and just look at points where we can connect. We are all together, so we discard if you are anti-Gloria or pro-Gloria, we don't touch you on that, [we're just here] for charter change – [we all] agree on that and we focus on that issue. We don't talk about the other issues where we are not together. Another thing about the landscape in Bohol are the personal relationships – we were all friends long before these issues.* ◀

Others were of the opinion that it is these divisions, the refusal of the women's

movement to fall under a monolithic structure and dogma, that is its strength.

On the other hand, this highlights the diversity and plurality of women's movements. The articulation that there are women's movements rather than a movement is indicative of the heterogeneity of the articulations, strategies, interventions and struggles. Such a universe of movements is comprised of a range of narratives and engagements, from national legislative lobbying to electoral engagements and party building, women-specific service delivery, gender issue advocacy, to local interventions on the GAD budget. Women's movements in effect can be viewed as spanning women-specific organizations, women-comprised associations and women in movements, including organizations that provide gender sensitivity training, education and advocacy on violence against women and reproductive self-determination, breastfeeding, mothers associations, young women caucuses, as well as women's desks and committees of sectoral and multi-sectoral formations and blocs. Apart from the heterogeneity of articulations and approaches, these women formations also vary in terms of the focus and site of their engagements, which may be local or national, regionally-based or NCR-based; their preferred arena of engagement in relation to the state, whether inside, alongside, or outside; and the ideological background or frame, with some following a particular ideological line or party structure, while others being autonomous women's formations.

In this regard, it can be said that a lot of varied initiatives are being carried out, which reflects the dynamism and diversity of the women's movements. Significant advances that are responsive to women's concerns, particularly in the legislative arena, such as the anti-rape law and anti-trafficking law, have been cited as some of their gains.

Yet there is also recognition that this strength – of diversity and plurality – can also

present a grave weakness that could further contribute to what some refer to as a setback of the movement(s). In one respect, there is no guarantee that the struggles of women in sectoral movements would be clearly articulated and that the "women" would be put forward in a sustained and systematic manner. Such a dilemma is presented in various ways:

- ▶ *Because of our history, our movement has given us a political education that looks at women as a sector rather than as women. It's true that when alone, we tend to lose that consciousness [as women], or we're not that conscious of being women. We also have multiple identities. Sometimes, given a situation, our consciousness as a peasant or urban poor becomes primary. For you to be conscious and consistent about your articulation as a woman, you need a collective or a proactive [women's] community.* ◀

An urban poor woman leader gave an illustration of this dilemma:

- ▶ *Urban poor women will give priority to issues of food and shelter before they address personal issues, such as violence. They would rather live that way... I'd like to have more experience where apart from economic issues and shelter, we also need to be able to protect ourselves, in whatever manner. One needs to think of a gimmick for an issue. But if it were about housing, you can be sure it would be easier to mobilize women because it affects them.*

Women are certainly being mobilized, but not particularly along issues that are currently articulated by the women's movement(s). Among the already organized, there may still be a gap between the discourse of the women's movement(s) and of *women in other social movements*, at least in the sense that one set of issues and ideas is more compelling than the other in terms of provoking urgent and direct action from women.

There is a growing recognition among women whose primary identification is with the mixed social movements, blocs or political parties, that some of the issues of the women's movements do not capture and resonate their immediate concerns. The other side of the coin is the assertion of feminists that other social movements, blocs or political parties do not seriously consider their issues. For instance, are housing and security issues not part of the feminist agenda? Are issues of violence against women not security issues in the way that security is understood by political blocs and parties? Is women's lack of control over their bodies not as important as the issues of housing, water and food?

Depending on where women *and* men stand, the views can be complex and complicated.

There is an argument that such diversity may present to women a dividing line rather than a point of convergence, that may underscore what divides women rather than what unites them. For instance, such divisions have become stark in various debates and dynamics among different groups, particularly those that associate themselves with respect to the ideological divergence of women's formation. Some value the presence of such a diverse set of groups, which makes any "unity" project not only futile but also unnecessary.

On the other hand there are those who acknowledge the weight of historical, ideological baggages, but nonetheless consider the possibility of women overcoming their differences, and at the very least coming together on specific concerns and issues. At the same time, there are opinions that a very basic network may and should be set up, especially in view of the need for an alternative community for women activists who are also struggling within their own multi-sectoral formations, political parties and blocs.

The dilemma of the women's movement, i.e., of permeating mainstream discourses on gender and politics, is echoed in the

experiences of women in other social movements, who are in a peculiar position of balancing their sectoral/ideological agenda with their assertions as women activists.

There is indeed that persistent danger that the women's agenda would remain marginal and subsumed under so-called "hard," "pressing," "larger" political issues. This kind of bind is reminiscent of the emergence of the women's movement and the conditions that prompted the assertion of a feminist stance in the face of then dominant party and movement discourses on political struggles.

▶ *It seems that while you are struggling for the feminist agenda at the national level, you also have to struggle for it within your own party or formation... And then within the women's [movement], there is a division between those who are focused on a feminist or gender-specific agenda and those whose primary identities are the sectors they carry, such as peasant or urban poor or migrant workers, etc.* ◀

The divides that have been perceived as antagonistic to each other are the "feminist" agenda versus the "gender" agenda versus the "sectoral" agenda – as if a woman's identity is fragmented into (a) her being a woman in or by itself, (b) her being a woman in relation to the power relations she has with the men in her life (in the family, workplace, community and larger society), and (c) her being a woman within the context of her being a part of a class group, e.g., peasant, urban poor, etc.

Peripherally, the conversations also touched on individual antagonisms rather than political or ideological conflicts. Participants noted that personal conflicts brought about by differences in personalities, styles of work, or simply ego, had contributed to the fractiousness within the women's movement(s). Some examples were given.

▶ *Some of us have based our networking or alliance-building on personal loyalties rather than principle issues.*

Our movement(s) is a reflection of the personalistic character of our culture, where personal loyalties are exacted to the point of losing sight of the more strategic and bigger goal of social change. ◀

There was no agreement among the participants and leaders of the various women's groups, political parties and blocs, on how best to resolve the issues of diversity, multiplicity of struggles, the subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle conflicts between women in feminist formations and women in mixed social movements, and the high-profile conflicts caused by incidents of ego-bashing among some women.

What clearly emerged in the conversations was the age-old dilemma of class vs. gender, feminism vs. nationalism. But what everyone conceded was the need for continuing the struggles. Many women had come to the point that to change society, small steps were needed.

▶ *I have one humbling lesson – we started with a big dream, the dream of social transformation, and I can't do it alone because that is too big for one person. I realized that to be able to contribute to that one big dream, we can start by focusing within our sphere, our little sphere – starting with the family, then friends and from there be content or happy with the little changes we have caused because of that influence. That's my only ambition now. I've become happier, less frustrated, less pained. I see the little changes in my own personal life and the lives close to me.* ◀

9 Bridging attempts

Attempts to “bridge” issues appeared to coincide with attempts to “bridge” groups. Certainly, the most important and recent case that can be cited is the 20,000-strong Women’s Day Rally in 2005 which brought together women’s formations from all political tendencies and ideological fronts, including those from Laban ng Masa, Abanse! Pinay, GABRIELA, and many other formations, mixed organizations and feminist groups. The *Pagkakaisa ng Kababaihan* (Women’s Unity), a short-lived network of women’s groups and political blocs that launched an anti-Arroyo campaign, the campaign initiated by several women’s groups, political blocs and civil society groups that called itself *Welga ng Kababaihan* (Women’s Strike),²² and the Task Force Subic Rape (TFSR),²³ are only some of the examples of these broadening initiatives. In the latter case, there appeared to be a preponderance of political blocs that tied the issue of rape to the issues surrounding the legitimacy of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). Feminist groups or women-led organizations were fewer in the TFSR.

Whether these initiatives are premeditatedly based on an agenda of “bridging” or simply a conjuncture of historical moments where the feminist agenda and nationalist importance of the former easily connected is not clear. The TFSR was mainly aimed at bringing together as many groups as possible that could support the struggle of “Nicole” against her US marine perpetrators.²⁴ *Welga* had one big successful campaign and was frozen for

a time; *Pagkakaisa* did one successful media campaign then became moribund.

With such a scenario, one is bound to ask: when there are no more material resources for such big and broad initiatives, would such bridging efforts be sustainable? Would those organizations, blocs and political parties that are not women-specific but with greater material resources be able to share already scarce resources with women and their formations that wish to widen their networks and continue the bridging process? Were the social movements that were not necessarily feminist in their political orientation able to sharpen their understanding of the ideological import of feminism? Conversely, were the feminist-oriented groups able to sustain their ties to the “broader” class issues and incorporate these to their women-focused political mandate?

Whatever the answers may be, there seems to be strong indication that women’s organizations and formations are becoming more and more open to working together, at least on specific issues and concerns. However those involved in these networks assessed their engagements, it can be said that the first steps in the bridging process has been taken. There is still a lot to be done and improved in this respect, but nonetheless these are small unities that show us where and how to begin. These efforts and initiatives to date have yet to be replicated and sustained. Sustaining this is the bigger challenge.

22 *Welga ng Kababaihan* brought together 50 organizations and formations in a collective “multi-sectoral action.” The *Welga ng Kababaihan* information sheet said it was “a dream long held by women and feminist groups in the Philippines to collectively forge a nationwide movement of women around the economic issues that deeply affect them, particularly poverty and globalization.”

23 TFSR had 17 member organizations. GABRIELA also had its own campaign that supported “Nicole.”

24 “Nicole” is the name of a young Filipina who was raped by US marines in late 2005 in Olongapo City, one of the sites of the training exercises between the Philippines and the US under the Visiting Forces Agreement or VFA. Women’s groups and other progressive organizations formed a coalition called Task Force Subic Rape (TFSR) that supported the legal case filed by “Nicole” against the servicemen. One James Smith was found guilty, the rest were released due to lack of evidence. Smith is being held in custody by the US Embassy authorities in Manila, instead of serving his jail term in a Philippine prison facility.

10 Public and Private Spaces: Women Do the Balancing Act

Women in movements are faced with multiple burdens, waging struggles on various fronts, and balancing different interests and agendas, in the same way that in everyday life the women have been doubly burdened with the maintenance of both the productive and reproductive spheres. To many, work in their social organization, bloc or party remains the primary official task that is complicated by the added struggle of infusing the sectoral formation with the women's perspective. As such, it has been noted that "women who are active carry many loads."

According to some of the respondents, in many multi-sectoral formations there appears to be a lack of focus on women's issues. Much of the women's work is lodged on and at times restricted to women's desks or committees, which prevents the women discourse from permeating the sector's over-all political work. When it came to women issues, the attitude was "may women kayo diyay, bahala na kayo" (you have women there, let them take care of it) or "trabaho nyo na yan" (that's your task). In effect, "inaasa lang sa mga babae yung issue ng women kasabay ng mga iba pang nakaatang sa kanya" (in effect, women are charged with women's issues along with the other tasks they are responsible for) – rather than being a programmatic agenda embedded in the organization, formation, political party or bloc.

Cultural traditions dictate that women are for the home. To paraphrase a party list representative:

▶ *Traditional expectations say that women should be in the home, and often we are expected to be quiet. They say that women exercise leadership within the home, captured by such idiomatic expressions as "ilaw ng tahanan" [light of the home] for the women vs. "haligi ng pamilya" [foundation of the family] for the men. But when you extend the imagery, perhaps it can also be said that women in the home*

are like policy makers too, a kind of a policy brainwork that includes economic activities. I think women can use this sphere... In organized communities and sectoral organizations, women are there too. There are assumptions about the women in these organizations, but really, we are still experiencing double burden.

Sometimes we do get leadership positions, but all the administrative work, the maintenance work are still given to women, so it's still double burden. Also, we feel the need to double our efforts to prove that we deserve to be leaders. ◀

Many of the respondents believed that women are generally good leaders. The training to lead and manage, said one participant, starts at the family level. Poor women make "miracles" in their everyday life, as one respondent said, i.e., they find food for their families, manage very scarce resources, take care of the children despite the odds. Even only at the household level, or at the community level, women are already exercising leadership. Women need training, skills upgrading and confidence building so that this leadership can get transported into the public arena.

11 The “reluctant” feminists

In a series of workshops conducted with members of Akbayan, some uneasiness about the words “feminism” and “feminist” as an identity surfaced.²⁵ The following key points were raised: (a) they don’t exactly know what the word feminist is although most of them have a sense that it means women fighting for women’s interests; (b) there has been a lack of education within their base organizations about women and gender issues, thus from where they come as members of Akbayan, there could be many definitions of feminism; (c) there was a perception among some of them that feminists are aggressive, men-hating women, arrogant and self-absorbed individuals who tended to brag about their feminist ideas; (d) those they personally know as feminists had not been good role models; and (e) they want to be feminists but don’t know if they already are in terms of their political work and the practice or praxis within their personal lives.

What was clearly coming out was the need for these women to integrate in a holistic manner what could be their feminist identity, their political work within their base organizations and within Akbayan as their political party, and their personal lives. While this is an excellent ideal, women tend to be too hard on themselves.

Feminism and its call for gender equality is also another line that cuts across and fragments women’s movements. While feminism is one idea that many women’s organizations and formations subscribe to, it cannot be claimed that it is the unifying factor of women’s organizations. As one Bangsamoro woman leader bluntly stated:

- ▶ *We have a rather simplistic view on women in that for as long as we knew our rights, we didn’t care what gender was, we didn’t care what feminism was.* ◀

This is reflective of the general stance of Bangsamoro women who see their

discrimination and oppression rooted not in their gender but in their political identity as Bangsamoro. Bangsamoro women and men are equal, although according to Islam, they have distinct roles to fulfill. In this sense, the call for gender equity (meaning, giving women and men what is due them) rather than equality is more relevant in their society: Thus, national government advocacies such the advocacy of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) for gender equality is translated into gender equity at the grassroots level:

- ▶ *When we were new, we didn’t give much attention to gender because we didn’t see the relevance of gender and development in our lives. At that time when I was new to government, they were talking about gender and development and it was basically sexuality and gender equality, which we don’t subscribe to because we always believe that our advocacy is gender equity. Whatever women can do, that’s all. We are equal with men. What I mean is, we don’t subscribe to the idea of gender equality.* ◀

There is also a reluctance to adopt feminism as an organizational principle because of the view that its ideals are difficult to live with. The term “gender” and the goals of “gender and development” are deemed to be more attainable. As one woman leader said, “*Di ba kaya ako tumatahimik [na] lang [ako tungkol sa feminista? Sabi ko gender lang ako. Mahirap.*” [That’s why I’ve been keeping quiet about feminism. I say, I’m just advocating for gender. It’s difficult.]. Specifically referring to Akbayan, one of its women leaders in Zamboanga shared her misgivings about the organization claiming to be “feminist”:

- ▶ *It’s difficult! We cannot say being feminist requires only simple changes. It is a very profound concept, over which you might want to hang yourself. If [Akbayan] is becoming open to change, that’s okay. With me, it’s okay if the organization is sincere in wanting to change. But to claim feminism when you haven’t done anything yet.* ◀

²⁵ These workshops were carried out by Akbayan in 2005 to enhance the capacities of their leaders especially from the communities in understanding and coming to a collective decision about their identity as a socialist feminist organization and developing a women’s agenda within their political party. This reference in the present paper is brought in to bring clarity to the topic.

12 Other factors affecting divisions



There are factors that the participants identified as dividing not only the groups in the landscape of the women's movement.

- > **Power** – A participant from Bohol said, “I believe we have to go back to the feminist way of using power, “facilitated power” rather than a “power over” thing, and what I see in Manila and among the groups is they are still using the power over in pushing for something. So it should start in each one of us... I think if we have that and we learn to use that, we have one cause, we are all one in our protest, which is to help women.” Some participants observed that some of the women, including those who call themselves feminists, in fact exhibit “macho” attitude, and think and act like traditional and typical males.
- > **Competitions for resources** – With the resources getting scarce, there is also a perceptible divide around the issue of material resources, where competition

for funds has become a tenuous point for divisions and conflict.

- There may be some competition, one respondent said, but that should be seen in a healthy way. The country is so big, there is so much that needs to be done, we can all have a place for our advocacies.
- > **Credit grabbing** – Some of the participants cited “credit grabbing” as a problem. This is still related to power and competition for resources.
 - > **Cooptation** – Another issue raised was co-optation. The entry of women into the bureaucracy has helped push some of the women's agenda into the mainstream of government. This is a doubled-edged sword, they said, since there is also a danger of being coopted by a system which is on the whole gender-blind and even anti-women. There are lots of temptations, power and resources,

one respondent said. Another one acknowledged that, *"Yun na nga, [para lang sa] credit, na co-opt tayo. That is one of the things that really [got] us down."* Even the language of women's rights has been coopted, some observed.

To what extent the above factors have affected women's participation in social movements was not determined in the conversations. However, their impact on the advocacy for women's human rights in general can be culled out. Relevant to this are the points raised on the isolation and depoliticization of the women's agenda from the broader agenda of national liberation. Critical reflection by women leaders surfaced concerns over the strong push to frame women's issues as personal and community problems, and without rooting it to structural and systemic transformations necessary to sustain the changes for women.

Women and politics to many mean going beyond electoral politics, often the popular notion of "politics." A participant offered a holistic meaning of politics and its relationship to and impact on women. In many ways, she summed up the various sentiments of the women in the series of conversations:

▶ *To me, it's broader; the conventional meaning given to it now refers to those engaged in electoral politics. That's why the indicators are gender development indicators which include such things as how many women [are] in parliament; how many [women are] elected, etc. – the level reached by women striving for elected political positions, which are now part of the political movement...*

I would rather look at it in terms of women in decision making, in positions where they can make decisions not only for themselves but for a larger constituency, not just for women but for a community, a barangay – and not necessarily elected. Empowerment to us in WomanHealth has three components. We always say that we should start with our bodies, ourselves, and

our personhood (pagkatao). We cannot influence outside of ourselves unless we are able to take hold of ourselves. At the core is your reproductive self-determination, then economic autonomy. These three things cannot be separated. They have to interact and they have to strengthen each other. Women's work has its own value, and that value must be recognized and must be given, and of course the material things, the economic resources. There should not be constraints in attaining women's empowerment, and the only things that could be constraining are your personal ability, relationships or circumstances – but even those are part of our struggles. ◀

Politics for a number of the participants is both an external and internal engagement.

▶ *Politics is when you have to deal with power. It involves how women should view and exercise power. The decision to aspire to power is in itself a decision that involves power. Even in conventional political science, of course politics deals with power and the struggle for power. You can look at it in a vulgar way, i.e., "politics is dirty," and it is understood this way and practiced largely this way. But women are not yet there in politics because they haven't influenced this sphere of action.* ◀

Both the "private" and "public" realms of women's realities are integral to their political participation. What is generally perceived as personal and intimate relationships and the power dynamics that govern those relationships are part of women's struggles for attaining empowerment.

Perhaps the most complex arena that male-dominated organizations and social movements have difficulty grasping is this personal space and circumstances that link women's political participation in the public arena. It is also this personal and intimate struggles for empowerment that bring along with it, for women, the complexity of their own struggles as women and as political beings.

13 Electoral Politics and Women

▶ *That's the reason why so many in the women's movement who entered [mainstream] politics were coopted. Their framework in addressing issues was not holistic. Maybe the reason why some women's groups have not integrated into the framework of the women's movement is because it is not clear to them.* ◀

There are various ways to change society. Revolutions, rebellions, coup d'états, among others, have been a part of many countries' landscape. Wars of aggression have even been parlayed as ways of changing societies. Colonization has been a method to allegedly "civilize" so-called "primitive" cultures and bring them into the "modern world." In all this, women played important roles, but as it is male scholars who generally write history, there is a need for feminist scholarship that brings to the fore women's contributions to social change.

In the Philippines, the role of women in the struggle for suffrage has been acknowledged. Filipino women won the right to suffrage and representation in formal spaces of political power in 1937 through a national plebiscite.²⁶ Filipino women's suffrage came after almost three decades of lobbying both the US government (because the Philippines was a colony of the US then) and the Philippine Commonwealth government (established in 1935). This was a milestone in the history of the women's participation in electoral politics. Since then, women have been represented – albeit in very small numbers – in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government. Thus all laws relating to holding public office, political participation, elections and electoral reforms are also applicable to women. Whether women's presence in these branches of government actually articulates the aspirations

²⁶ Prior to this, Act No. 4112 was passed by the Philippine Commonwealth government in 1933 to amend section 431 of the Administrative Code thus preparing the way for the national plebiscite. The 1935 Constitution stated that only if 300,000 women voted in favor of suffrage would this right be extended to all women. The suffragist movement was able to gather 447,725 affirmative votes.

of the majority of Filipino women however is another issue altogether.²⁷

In many countries including the Philippines, the majority look to electoral politics as a key arena of change. People hope that a change in leadership, whether in local, provincial or national levels, would also bring about a change in the situation of their lives. Often, they hope that new leaders would bring along new ways of addressing age-old problems of social, political and economic inequities. Despite the seemingly growing cynicism about electoral politics as a transformative vehicle, by and large it remains the most acceptable method of changing leaderships that could lead to possible changes in the lives of the people.

Given the vast disparity between the haves and the have-nots, people and particularly voters look to elections to judge leadership, and from there to use the power to vote either to retain incumbent leaders who are perceived to have worked for the interests of their constituents or to oust politicians whose promises of a better life were only as good as during the campaign period. So it is hoped. Since the Filipino people obtained the right to suffrage, there have been innumerable elections and change in governments, from the commonwealth period to the present administration. Many of these electoral exercises have been used to a large degree to obtain more spaces, opportunities, wealth and privileges for the ruling elite.

According to the participants, entering electoral politics is not always an easy decision to make. It's a daunting and damning world of intrigues, where aspects of one's private life become fodder for public controversies and scandals; it's the easiest way to make enemies. On the other hand, women acknowledge that it also breaks down barriers, and women navigate a new terrain where their guts are opened wide to

²⁷ "Citizen Participation in Local Governance: Scanning Paper on Women in Politics", A Report by WEDPRO in collaboration with IPD, March 2007.

take in the blows of male politics and survive it with glory. For one, mainstream politics is dominated by the elite, and wealth is a key consideration, the exercise being an expensive endeavor.

- ▶ *It seems there's nothing to bar women from entering politics. But money bars women. Election is expensive, apart from needing connections. Politics in the Philippines is a family business... [If] you have the best chance of winning, [even] if you happen to be a woman, the family will field you... sometimes... [it is the] padre de familia (male head of the family) [who] would be the first option. Basically, it's who in the family has the best chance. It's a family business, it's employment. That's why the majority of politicians are still men.* ◀

A recent study on women and politics zeroed in on the barriers to women's participation in politics and governance:

- ▶ *Various cultural, political and economic factors – both personal and structural – continue to impede Filipino women's full and meaningful participation in politics and governance. Among these factors are the persistence of sexist beliefs and practices in domestic and public spheres, a male-centered ("macho") political culture, women's lack of skills and motivation to assume leadership roles, and inadequate support to enable them to enter politics and effectively perform their work. Then there are the real and imagined differences and tensions within and among the hundreds of women's groups and dozens of issue-based coalitions. Very often, these differences get in the way of influencing political parties and the electorates to advance women's political and economic interests.*²⁸ ◀

Four decades after women obtained the right to vote after long years of struggle, electoral politics remains a man's world. Legislation and policy reforms have been made but women

remain peripheral actors to this important nation-building exercise.

- ▶ *Beyond the issue of female representation, of course, is the bigger problem of engaging Philippine politics to respond to women's needs and interests. As the Philippine experience shows, increasing female representation in public leadership may not directly and immediately help promote women's concerns. Women leaders have to be sensitized and encouraged to put on the gender lens, so to speak, and in so doing use their power and influence to support pro-women policies, mechanisms, and programs.*²⁹ ◀

The study noted that machismo in Philippine politics continues to hinder women's effective and sustained participation in electoral politics.

- ▶ *Campaign funds are allegedly raised through gambling, prostitution and trading of prohibited drugs, or sourced out from businessmen in exchange for future favors. A well known political scientist and proponent of alternative politics describes the nature of traditional politics in the following manner. "Philippine political parties are unabashed 'old boys clubs.' There are non-elite individuals, mostly men, who identify with one or another party, but all of them are followers ['retainers' might be a better word] of elite individuals. These individuals are linked together in shifting coalitions from barangays [the lowest government unit] all the way to the national government in Manila. At the core of this system are wealthy families in the town centers united downwards with dominant barangay families and upward with similar families in other towns. Some of these families are wealthy enough on their own to unite municipal political organizations and finance provincial electoral battles, or battles for congressional seats at the district level. These families constitute the*

²⁸ Sobritchea, UNRISD, n.d.

²⁹ Ibid.

provincial elite. The national elite differs from the provincial only in degree. Most importantly, the national elite [consists] of families which have attained a level of wealth and status practically immune from the vicissitudes of political fortune. The other characteristics of Philippine political parties are the shifting character of membership and leadership and the absence of ideological or programmatic differences among parties..." (Rocamora 1998).³⁰

There is enough literature on Philippine politics and *machismo's* pervasiveness that has been critiqued by feminists from NGOs, media and the academe (e.g., Centre for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics 1998; Sobritchea 2000). Despite legislative reforms and some successes in changing the discriminatory attitudes towards women, stereotypical notions about "proper" and "natural" roles for women and men, and ideal masculine and feminine qualities and moral conduct prevail. Too often men (and some women, too) use these stereotypes to turn away women interested in taking the plunge into politics – women are described as being too emotional, indecisive, and physically weak to assume responsible government positions. Child and family care is still popularly regarded as women's most important contribution to society.

When Corazon Aquino ran against Ferdinand E. Marcos in the 1986 elections, she suffered from the sexist campaign mounted against her. She was called a "fishwife" whenever she defended her views forcefully and was accused of being a "coward hiding under her bed" during a failed coup attempt. KALAYAAN women, along with other individuals and women's groups, rallied against the Marcos machinery and managed to sneak into the fancy Manila Hotel where an electoral event was happening, and rolled out posters and banners denouncing

the unabashed sexism of the henchmen of Marcos.

Women's nurturing and feminine image has been deployed to challenge the existing character of Philippine politics. This has a double-edged effect:

Such deployment of feminine traits indeed worked well against the representations of Marcos and Martial Rule. Unfortunately, these characteristics that enabled former President Aquino to lead the "People Power Revolution" were not effective in continuing the efforts of restoring democratic processes after the national elections of 1986. The feminine traits that were so highly valued in bringing down Martial Rule, were eventually used against her. She was severely criticized for being an inexperienced leader, for [toeing] the line of the Catholic Church on many socio-cultural issues. And such criticisms were used by restless members of the military and some political groups to seize political power.³¹

There are contentious points raised by other studies which opine that women continue to be stereotyped as better followers than leaders: they perform well in the background, "the wife, daughter, or mother" behind a successful male leader.³² Others believe that most women who have succeeded in breaking the glass ceiling have come from wealthy political families. There are assertions that women have to take on masculine practices and attitudes and exhibit a level of the so-called "wonder woman syndrome" to be able to achieve what often society expects of them as mother/wife/daughter and at the same time a political creature. There is always the danger of essentialism about women who are perceived to be less corrupt, more honest and gives more attention to details.³³ Muslim women are guided generally by the Islamic prescription for them to shy away from public life.

³⁰ quoted in Sobritchea, UNRISD, n.d.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Roces, 1998

³³ Silvestre, <http://www-mcnair.berkeley.edu//2001journal//Jsilvestre.html>

The lack of support for potential and incumbent women leaders, the lack of women's vote, and differences among women's groups have been cited as major factors in women's low participation in electoral politics.

Other than gender biases, political parties hardly provide enabling policies and mechanisms to improve women's chances of winning in elections. The four major political parties (e.g., the Lakas-NUCD, the Liberal Party, the Nationalist People's Coalition and the Laban ng Demokratikong Filipino (Struggle of the Democratic Filipino), for instance, have no affirmative action policies or programs to increase the number of their women candidates. Their political platforms fail to recognize the gender dimensions of the country's economic and political problems. As such, they do not explicitly articulate support for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.³⁴ However, it is interesting to note some positive changes in the political culture of the country. Some candidates planning to run in the forthcoming national elections, for example, have endorsed family planning and reproductive rights even if they risk losing the votes of conservative Catholics.³⁵

Sobritchea writes:

▶ *There are hundreds of women's groups of various ideological and political orientations... Many of its previous and current leaders have often taken a critical stance against government policies and programs. Because of its leftist origins, the women's movement has generally framed its gender analyses within the context of broad nationalist issues such as class inequality, imperialist control of the local economy, and the militarist approach to political stability.*

Women's problems have also been linked to State policies curbing legitimate dissent

and paralyzing popular mobilizations. The State is perceived as supporting the interests of local economic elites and foreign capitalists rather than that of the rural and urban poor. Across the years, the women's movement has waged campaigns against militarism in the countryside, the proliferation of anti-communist vigilante groups, and war-related sex crimes. Recently, the movement's more militant members have focused their attention on globalization's negative effects on women, on domestic violence, and on the violations of Filipino migrant workers' human rights.

At the other end of the political spectrum are many women's groups also purporting to promote women's interests. Some share the women's movement's perspective on some issues such as domestic violence and prostitution, but disagree on divorce, access to contraception, reproductive rights, and the like. Such disagreements have prevented women's organizations from supporting common female candidates. Traditional political parties are notorious for getting political mileage out of these differences, thus compounding the problem. These parties even pit the women candidates against each other, and reinforce the popular image of women's "inherent" quarrelsome nature.³⁶

Women become "seat warmers" as it is a common practice for either the wives or daughters or other female members of traditional politicians to run for office when their male kin are not able to run for office anymore for any reason including the untimely death or when the maximum term of office is reached.

▶ *This ensures their family's continued political control. Some become titular leaders, as their husbands continue to run the political affairs of their province, city, or village. They hold office until their husbands are again eligible to run for*

³⁴ <http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/phil/philmain.htm>

³⁵ Sobritchea, UNRISD, n.d.

³⁶ Sobritchea, UNRISD, n.d.

office. Many members of the Lady Mayors' Association, call themselves "breakers"... What these observations underscore is that traditional notions of gender roles and role expectations have a strong influence over women leaders. Unless they are made aware and properly capacitated to use their position to work for women's interests, then the increase in their number will not help promote gender equality.³⁷ ◀

To date, the majority of female political leaders, especially those holding national positions, come from political dynasties and economic elites.

The Party List law was passed in 1995; the 1998 national elections was the first time people voted for their party list representatives. To the social movements demanding structural changes, this became an opening to fully engage in the electoral process. Guns, goons and gold were to be struck down and changed with democratic processes, social accountability, transparency, with a pro-people, pro-poor and anti-elite agenda. After all, the social movement's foray into the formal structures of electoral politics was founded in the principle of bringing their constituents real voices, aspirations and hopes into the formal arena of governance. Women from the social movements assisted in this process. Communities were mobilized to deliver votes, became political machineries for civil society. Non-traditional politics became an opportunity for women not only to become volunteers but as expectant beneficiaries of change. But there are gaps.

▶ *We supported Akbayan but we were not solid for Akbayan. Others were for Abanse. Akbayan then had no programs in Cabanatuan.* ◀

Conversations in the streets, in the home, in the workplace and elsewhere strike at the heart of the issue of electoral politics. This was the often heard cynicism, "*Bakit, kung magbago ba ang mga lider sa pulitika,*

bubuti ang buhay ng ordinaryong tao?" (If the political leaders change, would the lives of ordinary people change?)

Since women entered the electoral arena – from the early years when women won the right to suffrage, to the 1990s when Kaiba became the first shortlived but historical all-women's political party, to the establishment of Abanse! Pinay and the Gabriela Women's Party – there have been big strides taken in moving headlong into "dirty" politics that has long been the turf of men.

37 Sobritchea, UNRISD, n.d.

14 Scanning the landscape of electoral politics

It is estimated that the Philippine population stood at close to 84 million in 2005. Almost half of this number (49.6 per cent) is female. Thus ideally, if there is to be a proportional number of women representatives in legislative bodies in relation to the group it is supposed to represent (i.e., women) then the ratio of male to female legislators should be 1:1.

However, this is not the case. As statistics from the National Statistical Coordination Board shows, women are very much a minority in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.³⁸

The Philippines became a Republic in 1898 when it declared its freedom from Spanish colonizers.³⁹ Since then, there have been 14 presidents of the Republic that included two women in its roster, Corazon C. Aquino (1986–1992) and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001–2004, 2004 to present). Both women assumed the key national leadership through popular uprisings, known as People Power, or EDSA Revolutions I and II, respectively. Both became presidents under special circumstances. Macapagal-Arroyo succeeded then president Joseph Estrada when he was ousted from the presidency in 2001. Despite her initial promise that she would not seek another term of office, she ran for the 2004 presidential elections and won amidst continuing accusations of electoral fraud.

Growing up in a political family and in an environment that nurtures the arena of electoral politics as an engagement has served some women well. Despite initial misgivings about entering the electoral arena, some women are able to transcend some

of the fears that electoral politics has been identified with, i.e., that is dirty and damning. Conversation participants who had been elected officials tell their stories:

▶ *I married into a political family and somehow I saw a relationship between money and what is done with it. I grew up in a city where politics is really dirty! I got involved with issues such as reproductive rights and VAW. But when PILIPINA set up Abanse, except for one lawyer, there was no other nominee for Mindanao. I was nominated and despite my initial doubts and wariness... that the Mindanao NGOs would simply be used, I finally relented, and from 8th position on the short list I became a nominee at a convention where there were many [delegates] from CODE NGO... and my name was still on the short list!*

I wasn't sold on the idea of being in electoral politics. But Atty. Lardizabal went to see my father, who always wanted to be a politician. My father talked to me. That's how I got into politics. I had no vision, I didn't know what this field was and what I was getting into. I thought it was really like legal work and since I was a lawyer, I thought well that's okay then. ◀

One participant entered electoral politics in 1992 as a city councilor and won three times, became a vice mayor for one term, then in 2004 lost in the elections. But she had to be sensitive to the culture of the area.

▶ *When I ran for office it was really difficult for me... here in Cordillera. Even when I was already in politics, as a councilor, and I wanted to run for vice mayor, one of the stumbling blocks and constraints was that tradition that it was always men who should be [leaders] and I'm not sure if it would be possible for a woman to [run]. There are other reasons. Basically culturally you have to undo [certain things]. Second physically*

38 Ibid: 4

39 The first female senator was elected in 1946, in the person of Geronima Pecson. This was the first Senate convened after World War II and after the Filipino women got the vote in 1937. Pecson was the only female in the eight-member Senate. After this, a woman or women have always been elected to this legislative body, except in the years 1955 and 1969. The highest percentage of women in the Senate was 25 percent in the 1967 and 2004 elections.

it is also difficult – you also have to have somebody with you, you cannot just go out especially in leading activities without somebody... I would go to the mines. When I have to meet people, sometimes that would involve drinking sessions. Culturally, it's not acceptable to be seen drinking or socializing that way. There's also the multiple burden that we have [as women]; at least my husband has been supportive. In my family, I am lucky that we are allowed to exercise my profession [as a lawyer]. ◀

In the last Congress, Akbayan's Etta Rosales and Riza Hontiveros-Baraquel and GWP's Liza Maza individually and collectively made women proud as party list representatives. Despite reported ideological differences among them, given their herstories of political leanings, media has shown that they managed to stand with dignity and courage in the face of bully tactics, complete with shouting matches and a good dose of male arrogance among their colleagues. Not only did they have to battle with male tactics but also with the dominant treatment of women and gender issues as secondary to all other issues. One party list representative shared:

- ▶ *I think a majority of women still have the general perception that politics is dirty and is a limited sphere, especially those who haven't participated in women or feminist agenda initiatives and even politics. There are steps we need to take to gain that attitude that politics is about engagement, empowerment, articulation, decision-making, and that it is a sphere where we can bring in the gender perspective, and fight for our agenda. We need to take those major steps as women citizens or as political actors.*

When it comes to formal politics within the State, from LGU to international, numerically we are there 100 per cent, but not all our [agenda] could be brought into formal politics. The State may not be completely supportive of our gender

agenda precisely because there are still only a few of us within the State. There is this big space where we can show women's leadership in different fields, and then of course, especially among Pinoys. It's been a big disappointment that we've had two female presidents... through that we should have [been able to push our gender agenda]. In the present dispensation, it's probably even true that her general policies are anti-women, and for specific struggles such as that of Nicole's, she has said nothing. ▶

Another oft cited barrier is the way electoral politics is traditionally played out with guns, goons and gold. Both grassroots women and women leaders in national formations cited lack of resources to pour into the campaign as one of the factors why they shy away from electoral politics. Participants from Akbayan-Aurora Province confirmed this: *"Malaki ang perang kailangan"* (a lot of money is needed). But it is not only the 3Gs that hamper women's participation. Some women continue to believe that politics is a man's world.

- ▶ *Money is not the only problem; there are women who don't believe that women can become leaders. They think, especially those who haven't attended gender sensitivity, that women can't enter politics. They would tell you, women are only for the home and shouldn't meddle in politics. There's still that kind of thinking. They will not support your bid for politics, they won't vote for you! It's only those organizations who are aware who actually struggle and participate in politics. But there are already many who are aware and believe that we need to go on and be known as women. There are others also who really fight for women. Now we are able to sit in municipal bodies and in some barangays. But there are barangays where we would not be acceptable.* ▶

In addition to the above, women leaders also cited being content as second liners to male leaders, who express phobia of the media

and fear losing their privacy, and of being “swallowed” up by the system, as factors in their decision not to run for public office. With regard to the last item, some women leaders in the conversations took a hardline stance against getting into electoral politics as candidates and becoming politicians.

▶ *If you're an alternative, why do you get into something for which you would like to be the alternative? Then you get absorbed into the system. If you're really an alternative, you should be outside the system.* ◀

The current situation is palpably more integrative of women's human rights owing to the faster flow of information, enactment of gender-responsive policies, and the presence of a strong women's movement. Women are more visible in public life, and there are more women role models for women wanting to be involved in electoral politics.

The social movements play a key role in pushing the edges of the limited electoral arena. Party list groups in the way that they have developed in the country have been a result of social movements' engagement with the issue of governance.

▶ *Political parties are vehicles of and in the center of electoral politics and forming government – and that is crucial to look at. Who do you find in political parties? But remember, not all parties are functional. If you look at the active political parties, there are two things you can't see. One, the women, and second, the way those parties reflect agenda on women or agenda for women. There is nothing like that [in mainstream political parties], except perhaps in party list groups, and then again, not all party list.*

Even among the party lists, there's probably only one or two who carry particular women's issues. Apart from that, you have individual candidates who claim to have sympathy for women but you can't see in their agenda in a structured and

organized way how they plan to carry that out. If that's the arena we're looking at, that is so far away yet. That's why the social movement is important, because they [politicians] also take their cue from the social movement. Most of them don't have a solid agenda. ◀

According to the conversation participants, there are examples of women in politics who have made a dent in traditional politics. Cited was Representative Daisy Fuentes along with Governor Grace Padaca of Isabela.⁴⁰ Padaca actively pursued cases of corruption, for which it was rumored that she would not win the May 2007 elections. “I heard she wouldn't shell out money,” one of the participants said. The administration of Governor Josie dela Cruz⁴¹ in Bulacan was also mentioned as an example of good governance. The extent to which these politicians have carried and pushed for pro-women reforms was not discussed in the conversations. Even so, their contributions to promoting women as leaders and advocates of transformative politics remain.

40 Grace Padaca was re-elected as Governor of Isabela in the May 2007 elections.

41 De la Cruz was on her last term; she could not run again for the same post.

15 On women's electoral agenda

Most participants agreed that traditional political parties are devoid of any clear women's agenda. Most of the electoral platforms are so general and more or less saying the same things – poverty, education, social services.

▶ *In the first place, it's not known publicly if candidates have women's agenda. They carry [an agenda] that is for the general population, more or less saying the same things, and if they say anything about a women's agenda it's all very good on paper but not in practice! You don't see it on the ground.* ◀

Despite electoral politics being a man's world in general, there are those who believe that women's issues are issues that can be a political platform. A community organizer who attempted to run for a local position sans political machinery and resources echoed this idealism.

▶ *My thoughts are all on women's situation. Men in politics don't think about the women's situation – they only make the laws that suit them. I thought that if I win, at least there would be someone who would make appropriate laws for women. We have women lawmakers, but they don't make laws for women. So if I win, my focus would be on exploited and oppressed women, like those who are in prostitution. I would be all about women, I won't focus on men. That's why when the speaker would introduce me, he'd say, "Here's the champion for women. If anyone here is battered, she'll be the one to fight for you." Uh-oh, I'm dead! I might not get elected for that. But when it was my turn to speak, I always said that women and men are equal. It didn't mean that I was anti-men.* ◀

Building a women's agenda is hard work – from supporting candidates to lobbying and ensuring that the agenda is carried onto the legislative work.

▶ *To build the women's agenda, there may be a need to support women candidates*

and politicians to win seats. Of course these are not perfect situations. They may not have feminist agenda, but if it's possible, let's see how we can help them; they need to be helped. Except if they don't have anything at all, no consciousness at all about women's issues, don't want to learn or have the humility to do so.

Then after the election, we need to watch them, but enable them to develop their own agenda. In other words, let's give them facts and figures, let's give them knowledge so that they can pursue [the women's agenda]. Let's mix being a watchdog and being a supporter – what we call political collaboration. ◀

PILIPINA's foray into mainstream politics made them realize a few things. An elected official has to negotiate the divisions of power within mainstream politics, that is, whether one belongs to the "majority" or the "minority" affects one's agenda, even how clear it is.

▶ *PILIPINA's agenda is basically increasing the quantity and quality of leadership of women leaders in official decision-making structures. So, in the past, we've done several intervention programs, building capabilities for women to engage politics and assume position, in leadership decision-making bodies. To a certain extent, we've had some successes in terms of individuals, for example Celia Flor, who successfully carried the women's agenda even though she was not able to successfully carry through the ordinances she filed because she was an opposition and belonged to the minority. But in terms of promoting the women's agenda outside the council, she was able to do that, including developing women constituents or supporting women's issues.* ◀

The Gabriela Women's Party was born out of GABRIELA, a national women's coalition set up in 1984. GABRIELA is clear in its mandate "to transform women into an organized political force." It is a movement, according

to its documents, "dealing distinctly with the problems of women as women, working to free women from all forms of economic and political oppression and discrimination, sexual violence and abuse, neglect and denial of their health and reproductive rights; a movement integral to the national liberation struggle for sovereignty, a democratic and representative government and equality between women and men in all aspects of life,"⁴² out to harness half of the country's population. Known for its anti-government stance, it was a surprise to some when GABRIELA decided to enter electoral politics. In an interview with leading personalities of GWP, they explained the main objective of GWP and its relationship with the mass movement:

- ▶ *We believe that it's a new arena where we can enter and maximize the opportunity to advance women's concerns. GABRIELA was there when KAIBA was formed. But I think the time wasn't ripe then to participate in electoral politics, and even the movement at the time was not really sold on the idea of participating in the electoral process, and how to position ourselves there. But anyway, since we've already experienced building a women's party even before the party list system in 2001, it was also thought that perhaps it would be good to enter that arena. First, we could ventilate women's issues on a wider scale, and then there is the capacity to make your issue a national concern in the context of elections, of course without giving less priority to building the mass movement because it is this which would push along your electoral work.*

To GWP, the enactment of the party list system and the entry of many groups into that system had admittedly pushed GABRIELA to enter electoral politics.

- ▶ *A big factor was the enactment of the party list system... all the other groups*

were venturing into it. It's not about being jealous of what others were doing, but rather seeing it as another effective platform to lobby for laws. It's different when you're an insider, and second, when poll surveys were taken, we saw that GABRIELA had a trust rating of 40 percent among women's groups. It was this combination [that pushed us to enter the electoral arena], plus there was really an upsurge in the [mass] movement because of Erap.

Combining mass movement agenda and strategies with mainstream electoral politics is undoubtedly a big challenge for GABRIELA and other political parties that had grown out of social movements. The same goes for Abanse! Pinay and Akbayan. Media has certainly been an excellent ally, particularly for GWP and GABRIELA, whose coverage has been not only on a national scale but international as well.

Women's agenda building is a continuous and sustained process that is based on consciousness raising and ensuring that young women become leaders themselves, and as one participant said, "to educate successors, young women leaders. Sometimes when women get married, it seems like they have more to lose because of their status, their family." One participant opined:

- ▶ *I think women have to be able to balance their approaches to non-traditional politics... change can happen in small ways, perhaps in the next ten years, [depending on] how the women's movement [develops]. Women should start at the grassroots and learn the ropes of politics. Organize women's movement as well as civil society. Being able to change politics from within and without. From within, meaning to play politics, we need to look at how we could influence the fight for equality. Organized groups should be able to present the feminist agenda, or if not a feminist agenda, at least one, two or three big issues. For example, reproductive*

42 GABRIELA homepage, http://members.tripod.com/~gabriela_p/

rights – that should be number one; number two, violence against women; number three, economic empowerment. Cut your goals into pieces but with a strategic goal. Create a niche so that you can have a clear direction. Then negotiate with the political party; ask them what's their stance on these issues? In other words, citizens in general not just women have to be demanding of their leader. We are not yet too assertive of accountability. ◀

The women's agenda, according to the participants, is not an exclusive purview of women. Some believe that men can also push for and carry the women's agenda.

- ▶ *Having more women is one way of pushing the women's agenda, in a numerical sense. But even if there would be more women, would they articulate and push for substantive thematic agenda on women and gender?*

In my view, there should be champions who would bring [the women's agenda] into most discussions. They can be men, not necessarily women. Of course it is much better if women carry the issue because they can really speak on it. Personality is still important, let's just accept that. You can appear "sweet" [in the mainstream political arena] but what is most important is the slow, solid inside organizing in groups like party list and other political parties. I don't think we can expect much from [mainstream] political parties. ◀

Agenda setting is one, but pursuing it and ensuring that women benefit from the agenda is another thing. A politics and governance professor and rights advocate said:

- ▶ *I'm speaking of articulating it in an agenda, but it's a different story if are you really going to pursue it. Like when I say pursue, questions like when you have the money, how do you use that money? Where do you use the money? This is governance. How do you reflect in our agenda for*

elections the issues of women? If you win and you sit as an elected official, what's our governance agenda? Basically, how do you see this agenda on paper transformed by way of say, projects that you sponsor, or programs you put in place, or the budget you allocate? How many people did I put in to make this project happen? That's governance. In our experiences, women's issue is invisible because when we say "politics," its all generic. ◀

The lack of women's agenda in political parties has been a clear indication of its being in the periphery. Professor Edna Co, a conversation participant whose experience on research and advocacy on electoral politics and women's participation is of breadth and depth, remembers:

- ▶ *[In an event where representatives of political parties were invited], the discussion touched on class issues – maybe here we have a chance to ensure that political parties consider these. [Many attended] but nearly all parties, except for one party list, had no women representatives. So, can you imagine how much embodiment of women there is for the whole electoral politics, by parties? But even then these women have not spoken on issues of women. They don't. We never hear them but perhaps they can speak more of class. I think the work has to begin from the parties themselves. When I say inside, inside the party list itself, inside the [social] movements that compose your own party list. NGOs are in social movements and they, in a sense, comprise the backbone of party list groups.* ◀

Related to this is a perception that women's issues are "not political enough" to command attention from politicians, or these are given only token measures in political campaigns. In this year's (2007) election in particular, two politicians claimed advocacy against abuse of women by their intimate partners as part of their platforms. They specifically cited the Anti-VAWC law in their political

advertisements. Another candidate also integrated reproductive health in his platform. Nevertheless, one of the conversation participants raised doubts about one of the politician's sincerity in his agenda for women.

Only party list groups, particularly all-women's parties like Abanse! Pinay and GWP, seem to be seriously taking on women's issues. There is also Akbayan that has strong connections with social movements and links with women's organizations. However, nearly all women in the conversations agreed that there is neither one women's agenda to speak of, nor a uniform analysis of common issues. The oft-mentioned example on this was the lobby for a law that would penalize abuse of women that has polarized women's groups on key issues, including the scope of the law (for instance, should children be included in the law?). The lobby for what eventually became Republic Act (RA) 9262, or the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act, was not limited to the halls of legislature but even more intense debates occurred among women's formations and at the grassroots level.

On the other hand, a woman leader in Cordillera stated women's issues are too controversial in their area that she will not win if she decides to run and carry a pro-women platform.

▶ *If I were to run for office, I will not carry women's issues because I know I will not win. They are not supportive... at the same time my identity as an advocate of women's rights is a negative thing. For instance, my sister ran for board member in Mountain Province. The smear campaign against her was that she has a sister, me, who had a rapist jailed!... They told me not to join her campaign rallies as I was a liability...* ◀

Many believe that transformational politics is necessary if only to carry through the women's agenda. A critical mass is necessary, many of the research participants conceded. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, perceived by

nearly all the participants as coming from the old mold of patronage politics, is seen as a liability for women, As one participant said, GMA is an argument against women, an anti-thesis of what women want of women decision-makers.

▶ *She just happened to be a woman. She does not carry the women's agenda, although in the first three years when she assumed the position through EDSA 2, in a sense, there were reforms. After 2004, when she supposedly won the election, she went back to transactional politics because it was basically politicians who made her win. In my view, this is a setback for the women's movement, so we are doing a lot of make-up work – creating or forming a model, a role model of a woman leader who will carry transformative agenda.* ◀

16 On the women's vote

Majority of the research participants agreed that there is no women's vote. One participant observed: "...a large percentage of women don't vote for various reasons. They are so busy, they don't have time to register. They don't even know they [have to register] as voters. Then, on election day, they are too busy! They don't have time to go out and vote." But there is hope that there can be a women's vote.

▶ *There is no women's vote. Such a vote would be distinctive in the sense that if there were a women's vote, it would be unified in terms of the political agenda they want to promote. If that is your definition, then there really is no women's vote.* ◀

But it's not impossible to have this in the future. All the participants recognized that there is a need to establish a women's vote, precisely to push the mainstream to recognize and value the contributions of women in society.

By women's vote they mean that political parties, mainstream or otherwise, should consider that the number of women voters could make or break them. To date though, majority of the women in the conversations stated that there is no women's vote as such yet. As one participant said, there is no organized women's vote precisely because society's consciousness about women's issues is not that developed anyway.

On the other hand, some say that there is already a women's vote, but this is felt more at the local or community level rather than at the national level. Secondly, the women's vote is not necessarily a vote for women or for a women's agenda. The active participation of women as mobilizers and campaigners for political sorties is a clear indication of the influence and connections they have within their localities. The greater concern for the women's movement is how to transform this influence to push for a pro-women agenda on the politicians.

At the national level, the presence of women's party list groups is also another indication that establishing a women's vote can be done. Since the implementation of the party list law, women's groups have been winning seats in Congress. This reflects that the women's agenda is a viable platform.

▶ *There's a lot to learn... We should also highlight that women are leaders in their own rights and values, you know, dimensions. [They exemplify] values [that] we need in the society and that they should not shy away from electoral politics. Here I am talking this way, but if anyone tells me, "Why don't you run?" I probably would say no. We are also not very brave. Hahaha! So you cannot ask of others what you are not willing to do yourself.* ◀

17 On gender quota



There are a number of policies that can be used to push for a gender quota. As an example, CEDAW can be used, according to Aurora Javate de Dios, herself an expert on the matter. CEDAW, she said, is an affirmative action or part of temporary measures because it will take many years before women can genuinely be empowered and their rights fully guaranteed. "It may even take 100 years!" The Philippine Constitution guarantees the equality of women and men, and this can be an opening for legal arguments on the need to institute the gender quota.

To date, only the Akbayan party has an articulated policy on gender quota. Their by-laws say that at least 30 percent of leaders at all levels should be women. In Congress, Akbayan has also filed the Gender Balance Bill, which, if approved, will ensure that 30 percent of all positions in the bureaucracy, military, police, government-owned and controlled corporations and other agencies,

are allotted to women. Political parties are also covered by the bill, and shall also reserve for women 30 percent of their official candidates for national and local posts. (See case study on Akbayan's gender quota below)

This measure, however, has been subject to criticisms within the Akbayan party and in the political arena in general. Within Akbayan, the critiques are not aimed to negate the need for a gender quota system within the party, rather it calls for a sharper analysis of the women's situations in political formations. A gender quota should be supported by other measures to sustain women's participation in political activities.

Addressing women's practical concerns is a prerequisite before women could even join organizations (one Akbayan leader jokingly suggested giving all Akbayan women washing machines to lighten their household tasks). It is only in this sense that women's participation will be meaningful. A second critique

concerned the number of women available to take on leadership positions in Akabayan. Doubts were raised that women could fill up the 30 percent of leadership. Factors such as women's training and experience in leadership, as well as the willingness of women themselves to be leaders, were cited. Particularly the last item, there are not that many women who would be willing to spend significant periods of time away from their families in order to fulfill the responsibilities of an Akbayan leader.

▶ *You have to facilitate women's participation in politics like having a quota where women will have a reserved seat. But in the party list, one must run as a candidate as a first step. Party list groups must be able to build big constituencies so they could really fight for their sectoral interests. That means all party list groups should field women. We should be able to obligate that each political party field at least 1/3 female candidates, or even more, say 50-50. That policy should start at the party level. Gender quota must start with the allocation of party seats. And most important, those candidates should have an agenda on women. Having a policy, for me, is secondary to having candidates with a clear women's agenda. If all political parties are not demanded to do so, it will be a long struggle.* ◀

Among the general public, the debates on the Gender Balance bill reflected the current perception of women as leaders, and the advocacy for gender equality as a whole. Reasons against the bill included the equality clause in the Constitution, and gender-stereotyped ideas of women as being more willing to be housewives than "compet[ing] for other women's husbands' jobs."

Another participant commented that while the measure was laudable, there are other more important laws to be passed for women. Secondly, the same person asked, [What if people who think like GMA are placed in important positions or are inutile

like Ombudsman Merceditas Gutierrez?] The gender bias of the statement is clear: women can be corrupt leaders, and so we must take care about providing them more space to hold key political positions. One could cite more examples of corrupt male leaders, yet their gender is not taken against them when they run for office.

But the participants to the conversations were not belittling the efforts of women, and the little successes that they have achieved collectively.

▶ *Looking at gains, in fairness to the women who were able to reach the national level, especially those with feminist awareness, they were able to present bills in Congress and the Senate, like the anti-trafficking bill and the Divorce Bill. These were taboo issues long ago, but women started carrying them, and so they have gained visibility even in a parliamentary body. These are gains to me. I also see as a gain the establishment of a political women's party, the Gabriela Women's Political Party. That's a big thing because now we have a distinct label for the women's sector. This has an advantage; it will really lead to the breaking up of the monopoly that men have over this arena.*

Of course in terms of weaknesses, there are still many women who enter politics without any women's consciousness. Many women and men in Congress don't carry women's issues, or they do so in a very limited way.

There has to be a more concerted effort... actually if you ask me I really don't mind if the politician is a man or a woman. My gauge is how they carry the issue of women. It's difficult to expect that it is only women who could carry this, there is the possibility of our issues being ghettoized. Instead it should be the issue of everybody. Moreover, we have a woman President, but she's so macho anyway, insensitive to

issues of women particularly poor women. At the end of the day, it's how they ensure that women's issues can be won.

The conversations acknowledged that there are more women in local government units, which for many, offer a more accessible and more direct participation in governance.

A participant noted that the presence of women and their agenda is still a long struggle at the national level. At the local level, things are more promising, she said.

- ▶ *Yes! I've seen some really good cases at the local level where we see women really being the workers and advocates. They are the ones articulating women's issues and they have real programs. When I was doing work with the NCRFW mainstreaming on the GAD budget I saw this. Those who are seriously pursuing GAD were a number of local officials who are women.*

This analysis is echoed in a study:

- ▶ *The painstaking efforts of the NCRFW, and feminist activists from academe and NGOs, to provide local women leaders with the "gender perspective," have born positive results. These groups have armed women leaders with the skills to prepare the GAD plan and effectively use the GAD budget. These leaders, in turn, have been able, albeit with great difficulty, to influence local planning bodies to include programs vital to promoting the wellbeing of poor communities, particularly these communities' women and children. These programs include, for example, installing potable water, establishing health centers and roads in far flung areas, providing credit, providing shelter and counseling for abused women and children, and supporting women in micro- and small-enterprise work.⁴³*

But even as community women are much more active at the local level, this is still not a guarantee of their substantive participation.

43 Sobritchea, UNRISD, n.d.

Women's role and status in electoral politics are also a function of ethnicity.

- ▶ *If you're talking about electoral politics, I don't think that indigenous women are strong on that. First of all, the level of education among indigenous women is not that high so they're not really that involved there. But they are very much involved in politics at the community level although they are not part of the political formations. Yes, they are part of the community because traditionally women have a role to play, but this varies depending on their tribal affiliations. For example, among the Igorots, the women's role is really strong, they do have a say over what's happening in the community, in decisions for the community. On those levels, they are strong, but of course they are not as educated as we are.*

We are educated, we have achieved leadership, but not necessarily like in Congress. I'm now the chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; in terms of indigenous women, we manage this kind of space to occupy... I really have power because of my mandate to decide and give advice to a government, to UN bodies, on how they should be dealing with indigenous issues. It's a big achievement for us.

Sites for women's political engagements can zoom in as closely as the level of interpersonal relationships, and can expand to integrate the global realities such as militarization and counterterrorism.

There are instances, as that in ARMM, where these two levels interface, i.e., advocates for human rights cannot come on too strong lest one is seen as subversive. In that situation, "Isang bala ka lang" [one bullet is enough to kill you] was a constant refrain from the women leaders who joined the conversations. The same was echoed in Abra where activism (equated as "heroism") against corruption may mean one's death (play the hero and you die).

Ironically, these leaders from Cotabato also see women's human rights as a "safe" advocacy as long as one does not implicate powerful people, including politicians. When asked if women's issues are as important as other issues for Muslim women, they said that it seems like "gender" issues are "outside" – like an observer.

In general, however, what seems to be the middle ground in the local and national/global levels are the communities of women in the barangays, the municipalities and the cities. These are spaces where women are actively engaged in the creation of their realities in various ways.

More than the participation in electoral politics as candidates and politicians, it is within social movements that women have actively challenged and engaged their communities and the State for reforms to address their marginalization, as women, as ethnic groups, and as members of sectors.

▶ *I started with the progressive movement, I didn't know anything about the women's movement. Men were mostly my companions. I used to be the one to clean our coffee cups and ashtrays but that didn't bother me. Now I see that there are more [women] who are aware. But it seems it is still difficult to insist [on our agenda]... if women are in mixed organizations it seems difficult for it to take off, they don't take us seriously. Laban ng Masa seems to be taking notice of us, and that's because we assert ourselves. We insist on being noticed and that is only right. But in my view, most don't take serious notice of the gender issues.* ◀

The persistence of the class and gender divide is also another issue that hounds the women's movement. As passé as it may be to many feminists, there still persists that idea that gender issues are divisive of broader formations because of (1) the solidarity feminists claim with all women, regardless of their class among others, vis-à-vis the idea that upper class women

are part of the oppressing class; and (2) its "anti-male stance." Women in multi-sectoral organizations and political blocs readily admit to the difficulty of mainstreaming gender even in so-called progressive circles.

Yet even self-identified feminists in multi-sectoral formations seem to make a distinction between what is "political" and what is not – and feminism is not construed as a political project within the organization and the society which is its context. Illustrative of this are the following quotes from women leaders in national multi-sectoral formations:

▶ *We got caught up in our political tasks. We neglected feminism, women's tasks. When you are confront[ed] with big goals... unless [you make a] conscious effort, you forget the women and the feminist aspect.* ◀

The class and gender divide also manifests itself in the way some women leaders, particularly those working with grassroots women, do not readily see gender-based violence as "survival" issues in the way that they regard housing and land reform issues as such. Said one grassroots woman leader:

▶ *For us urban poor women, we give more importance to issues of hunger and housing rather than personal experiences [of violence].* ◀

Despite these dilemmas and conflicts among women and among women in multi-sectoral groups, many acknowledged the fact that, to quote a participant, "we are divided on issues but there are other issues we can come together and work on." But there is also a proffered explanation on the divisions: "It's macho politics, the very thing we want undone... [but] it's actually what I see among the organizations [in Manila]."

Many others from the regions echo this. There is a perception that the farther a group or individual is from the National Capital Region, the less perceptible the divide is. Sometimes, the divide does not even affect them. Many regional respondents are of the consensus

that issues and problems regarding unities or disunities among women's groups in NCR, or at the level of broad national formations (based in NCR), do not really affect them, since most of them don't know the details of the problems. *"Hindi namin pinakikialaman, nahuhuli kami sa tsismis"* (we don't involve ourselves in it, we are late in getting the gossip). Instead, their work is based more on the personal relationships and connections they have with other groups, whether these are women's groups or groups where women are leaders.

According to one participant from Mindanao, women's groups come from different colors... "There is an acceptance that there may be issues over which we are not united, but there are issues where we can speak to each other and come together. There are different roles we can take on in partnership." Personal friendship also affects the quality of the relationship.

The concern over isolation and depoliticization of women's issues relates to the localization of women's struggles for empowerment. This statement refers primarily to two things. First, the way women's issues are articulated in such a way that it is de-linked from the broader context of national politics and globalization. Specifically cited here was the advocacy on VAW, which had been the "flavor of the month" among donor agencies and women's NGOs in the 1990s. Many campaigns against VAW were framed as national issues distinct and separate from issues such as poverty and access to basic services. The discussion of socio-economic classes as a major dimension of VAW was conveniently neglected as middle and upper class women and development professionals claimed the advocacy.

Second, depoliticization also happens when advocates are coopted by the system (read: government institutions and agencies) and activists become hesitant to challenge the practice of traditional politics. A participant noted the difficulty of women advocates going against or even critiquing the local government

which has been generally supportive and have funded their programs and activities. The politics of aid and funding has also contributed to the dilution of the women's political agenda. As one participant put it:

▶ *It is easier to get funding if you do not question the oppressing class, if the contents of your proposal do not relate to contentious issues such as class.* ◀

In a resource-scarce environment, when most international donors are looking for "impact" programs and projects, many women's groups and their feminist agenda have been sidelined, due to their limited reach and capacities. Big NGOs, including social movements, have managed to stay afloat in a highly competitive environment. International donors as well have proactively supported the government in an effort to stabilize the socio-political and economic situation that threatens peace and stability. There is no doubt that geopolitics and the globalization agenda of developing countries are a major consideration in the funding directions that many donors – many of which used to generously support women's groups in the country – are taking. Yet, many would concede, despite the "mainstreaming" of gender into many policies and structures of governance, women continue to suffer many inequalities. As a donor institution suggested:

▶ *The Philippines has one of the sharpest contradictions in gender equality today. Significant inroads in politics including having a woman president were achieved while numerous Filipinas continue to lead in national and international discourses and initiatives from the academe to politics and business. But there are also the women who are at the receiving end of domestic violence, trafficking and prostitution,*

illegal recruitment and unfair employment contracts in other countries.

The society in the end still places many gender problems as trivial and marginal. The legal framework for women seems impressive but the challenges of implementation and cultural shift remains. The interplay of culture and institutions like the bureaucracy, political offices, and the church makes the discourse on gender issues very animated and usually polarized.

Within the women's movement... advocacy and lobbying projects [have been initiated] to mainstream gender issues. Roundtable discussions, campaigns, and conferences are held to develop concepts and positions leading to legislations and policies. The current debate deals with domestic violence, abortion and divorce.

Gender awareness and sensitivity seminars also constitute the core of the activities – be it at the workplace, in communities, in government agencies, or within NGOs and people's organizations. This is a response to the fact that within organizations – like trade unions and other people's organizations – and in institutions – like local governments, judiciary and state offices – women's participation is still limited and their concerns are often ignored.⁴⁴

Part of the current directions of donors is the support for coalitions and alliances, a strategy that is expected to generate impact and streamline administrative tasks. However, in a dispersed environment where women's groups and social movements are factionalized, the potential for a much broader coalition-building hinges on the ability of organized social forces to go beyond their differences. It has been claimed that "[c]oalition-building is one of the effects of the conferences and training. Consolidated groups have participated in the Beijing+5

activities, women groups have joined in creating women-based party-list groups, and broad issue-based alliances have articulated their policy and agenda on gender fair laws, human rights, labor concerns and other social issues."⁴⁵ Yet despite these claims, there is enough evidence to show that the effect, if indeed true, has not built the necessary bridges to allow social movements to cross the self-imposed political and ideological limits of interactions.

This brings us to the next reflection: if bigger social movements have a power base that is construed by some as being wider and more rooted in community organizing, why have they not moved closer to incorporating in a more holistic fashion women's concerns and the gender equality agenda into their own agenda? Consequently, women and especially those from all-women organizations and NGOs would be more attracted to becoming part of such social movements. On many occasions, younger women have articulated their own anxieties about joining social movements, and one of these is their perception that many social movements are male-dominated, remain oblivious to the feminist agenda, and continue to insist that class is a broader perspective in which the struggles of women must be located. Class issues remain a primary concern of many social movements, including sections of the women's movement(s), and some women who consider themselves "socialist feminists" are critical of what has been termed the disconnect between class and gender issues.

⁴⁴ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Philippine Office, http://www.fes.org.ph/rgp_ph.htm; retrieved June 2, 2007

⁴⁵ Ibid.

18 Socialist feminism: the road to women's empowerment?

The call for socialist feminism by sections of social movements as an overarching ideological perspective in which women can bring forward their concerns is a call that is understood – and this understanding has yet to be verified and examined – by some women. Many community-based and grassroots organizations of women have generally not touched on ideological debates on the streams of feminism.⁴⁶ To a large degree, the discussion on the understanding of the ideological underpinnings of socialist feminism has been within small circles of women who are ideologically imbued in their advocacy, and certainly within the academic circles where women's and gender studies are taught.

Socialist feminism has not been a widely discussed topic among many women of this generation. In the conversations, this was not articulated, described or positioned as an ideological option. Whether this is a sign of anything is difficult to conclude at this point. In its most essential definition,

▶ *Socialist feminism is a branch of feminism that focuses upon both the public and private spheres of a woman's life and argues that liberation can only be achieved by working to end both the economic and cultural sources of women's oppression. Socialist feminism is a dualist theory that broadens Marxist feminism's argument for the role of capitalism in the oppression of women and radical feminism's theory of the role of gender and the patriarchy.*⁴⁷ ◀

Socialist feminism has stemmed from a general critique of Marxist feminism where class weighs heavily in its analytical framework. Socialist feminists do not focus

exclusively on gender to account for women's position. An analysis of class and economic conditions of women is a central element. In its classical sense, socialist feminists advocate the abolition of class and gender. For socfems, two central issues should be addressed: the reproduction of labor and the economic value of domestic labor. The nurturing, moral, educational and domestic work that women do in the family is seen as indispensable for the maintenance of a capitalist economic system. Women must enjoy reproductive rights and must take up paid labor, while women and men must share nurturing and domestic responsibilities. Socialist feminism has tried to incorporate other social divisions along the lines of race and ethnicity, sexual preference, age, and physical ability/disability to reflect the experience of racially and ethnically marginalized women as well as lesbians, older women and others.

Reproductive rights and paid work as two of the central concerns of socialist feminism therefore demand from its practitioners that these be put forward in transformational politics in the broadest formations as possible.

Trade unions therefore have a crucial role in attaining an environment where women's work in the home assumes an economic valuation, and second, that women's work in the public arena be empowering such that their reproductive roles are imbued with a rights perspective, i.e., their rights are protected and promoted in the context especially of their roles as mothers and wives. Trade union organizing has been generally male-dominated where decision-making positions often reside with men.

There are hardly data on the situation of women in trade unions. For women to be active participants in trade unionism, workers' tool for asserting their rights, they need to be able to be employed, and in employment

⁴⁶ Akbayan Women's Committee has engaged in this of late, and that has defined the current understanding of the members who attended the series of training workshops; this has also informed their political party's key policies in their last National Congress in late 2006. Akbayan appears to be the only political party/social movement that has openly described itself as a socialist feminist organization.

⁴⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_feminism

where their reproductive roles and needs are adequately protected and promoted. Women in the country are dominantly in the manufacturing and service sectors, and in the last decade or so as domestic helpers in overseas migration for work, areas of employment where tenure, salaries and protection are generally deemed poor.

- ▶ *Bargaining and campaigning for the rights of women workers has a real effect on women's lives – particularly where this relates to maternity rights and the rights of working mothers, such as paid time-off for breast-feeding. Trade unions have a crucial part to play in negotiating the terms and conditions of workers and, as part of this, in ensuring that nursing and returning mothers have appropriate rights.*⁴⁸ ◀

In the Philippines where the struggle for reproductive rights, in their intimate relationships and in the public sphere, i.e., programs and services that give women control over their bodies and freedom from imposed roles and violence, has been fraught with exceeding difficulties. Women and men have a long way to go. Apart from changing social relations, policies and programs have to be instituted to break the role restriction including violence that accompanies women's assertion of their reproductive autonomy and rights.

Work and reproduction are so intimately connected in socialist feminism. Thus social movements and other sectors working for strategic and sustained transformational politics need to strategically address these issues. In the meantime, women in the country are doing their best to keep their families fed, clothed, sheltered and protected, as they organize, mobilize and continue their struggles as women within their homes, communities and organizations. As long as women do this, the perceived divide between class and gender is hence a divide that does not recognize the multiplicity of women's

struggles and the many fronts where these could be asserted.

That the issue of political empowerment takes various shades from the participants' ideological perspectives has been shown by the conversations. Some are willing to engage the State through active and direct participation in its programs; others want a greater distance. Yet no one could belie the fact that politics and governance as an agenda for social change and arenas for contention and women's engagement, are within the realm of the public space in which the State is a player.

From the conversations, it was clear that electoral politics is seen as the most visible arena in which women have and continue to assert themselves.

- ▶ *Moreover, women in politics and in decision-making positions in governments and legislative bodies provide opportunities for "transformative leadership" by redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and experiences and provide new perspectives on mainstream issues.*

While some countries in Asia and the Pacific have taken positive actions to promote the participation of women in local government and decision-making, nowhere in the region are women proportionately represented in local government, political parties or civil society organizations unless these are women-oriented in nature. Even in countries where opportunities for women's representation and participation exist, women have not been able to effectively utilize these. The reasons are multiple: patriarchal social systems, social and cultural prejudices, financial dependence of women, lack of media support and exposure to political processes and limited training opportunities for women. Women may also be discouraged from

⁴⁸ Department for International Development (DFI); <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/dfidwork/tradeunions/working.asp>

*seeking political office by discriminatory attitudes and practices, family and child-care responsibilities, the high cost of seeking and holding office and by the criminalization of politics.*⁴⁹

Electoral or not, women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.⁵⁰

Undoubtedly, women in the Philippines have made strides in their struggles, whether they come from social movements or sections of the women's movement(s). The most prominent gains of and for women in the last few years are in the legislative arena. The passage of such laws as the "anti-mail order bride," anti-rape bill, anti-trafficking and anti-violence against women and their children are three of the most notable of such gains. However, it remains to be seen whether there are fewer women and children being subjected to the crimes delineated in these laws, and if the implementation has been contributing to the general upliftment of women's situation and promotive of their rights. To borrow a phrase, overall it has been "too few, too little" for women especially for the poor indigenous women despite their increasing participation in nearly all aspects of Filipino life. Yet for the small victories, women have proven their worth as partners for social change. A little more help from the social movements would not hurt.

49 Country Reports on the State of Women in Urban Local Government <http://www.unescap.org/huset/women/reports/>; retrieved June 2, 2007

50 Guidelines on Women's Empowerment United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN) UN Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, with support from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA); <http://www.un.org/popin/unfpa/taskforce/guide/iatfwemp.gdl.html>; retrieved May 15, 2007

19 Women's political participation in international human rights and national laws

Women have the right to be actively engaged in public decision-making processes in their societies in all levels, in all stages and whatever form participation may take in each stage. Women as a formation have equal right with all groupings in society (whether this grouping is based on gender, economic class, race or ethnicity) to have an opinion, voice out this opinion and undertake activities to ensure that this opinion is considered and adopted in public fora. In the Philippines, national laws, including the Philippine Constitution, further promote this human right that is the fundamental law in the country. Specifically, the Constitution states:

The State recognizes the role of women in nation building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men. (Article 2, Sec. 14 on State Policies)

However, it is one thing to say that Filipino women have this right, and for them to exercise it. Overarching their participation in politics, and in public and formal decision-making processes in general, is a culture that tolerates gender-based discrimination, and appropriates women's political agency to mainly as voters. While voting may be considered as the most direct and equalizing form of political power exercised by all citizens of a State, it is also seriously limiting of women's choices to only formalizing the "best" among what privileged males presents to them. The more critical aspects of women themselves defining public agendas and actions grounded and responsive to their realities are often ignored.

This situation is not lost to Filipino women who have a rich herstory of leadership and political engagement dating back to pre-colonial times. The 20th century saw the achievement of milestones for women's participation in electoral politics, from

getting the right to vote, to organizing women-specific parties and winning seats in the national and local legislative bodies, to fielding two women presidents through popular uprising. However, the extent that the aforementioned milestones have achieved for all women full exercise of their right to political participation is still debatable. It is a fact that women are still a minority group within the political arena, both in terms of their number, and with regard to the representation of women's concerns.

This paper seeks to map out those issues. Scanning the literature on Filipino women and politics, the paper will present an overview of the spaces for women's political participation, the current trends regarding this, and the challenges they face as women in an arena presently dominated by men.

As a scanning paper, the discussions are limited to women's engagement in electoral politics, specifically in national legislative bodies. It is hoped that by presenting major discussion points on the subject, insights can be drawn to guide actions to further strengthen women's political participation in general.

Spaces for Participation in Electoral Politics

The necessity of women's political participation rests on three basic principles or human rights:⁵¹

- (1) Equality between women and men
- (2) Women's right to develop their full potentials

51 Kanwaljit Soin "Why Women, What Politics?" (available at <http://www.capwip.org/resources/resources.html>, accessed last 07 October 2006)

(3) Women's right to self-representation and self-determination

Filipino women's right to participate in the electoral system is protected by the State through its ratification of human rights instruments, adoption of international consensus documents, and enactment of State policies, even if the government is not explicitly promoting so. Some of these policies and consensus documents are outlined below:

At the international level:

> **Universal Declaration of Human Rights:**

A basic principle of the UDHR is equality of all peoples, including gender equality. Thus all the human rights stated in the UDHR are also rights of women. The right to political participation, including the freedom of speech and organizing are found in articles 19 to 21, and 27.

> **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women:**

The CEDAW was ratified by the Philippines in 1981. In doing so, the government signified its intent to fulfill its obligations under the said treaty which is essentially to protect, promote and fulfill women's human rights. Political participation is explicitly stated in the following articles:

Article 7

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold

public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

- (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

Article 8

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

- > **Beijing Platform for Action:** The BPFA is the outcome document from the Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995 which outlines the actions governments must take to ensure women's human rights in their respective countries are fulfilled. One of the 12 critical areas of concern identified is the inequality between women and men's political participation. Along this line, the BPFA forwards two strategic objectives for governments: (1) to take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making; and (2) increase women's capacity to participate in decision making and leadership.

At the national level

Filipino women won the right to suffrage and representation in formal spaces of political power in 1937 through a national plebiscite. Prior to this, Act No. 4112 was passed by the Philippine Commonwealth government in 1933, to amend section 431 of the Administrative Code thus preparing the way for the national plebiscite. The 1935 Constitution stated that only if 300,000 women voted in favor for suffrage would this right be extended to all women. The suffragist movement was able to gather 447,725 affirmative votes.

The Filipino women's suffrage came after almost three decades of lobbying both the US government (because the Philippines was a colony of the US then) and the Philippine Commonwealth government (established in 1935). This was a milestone in the herstory of the women's participation in electoral politics. Since then, women had been represented – albeit in very small numbers – in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government. Thus all laws relating to holding public office, political participation, elections and electoral reforms are also applicable to women. Whether women's presence in these branches of government actually articulates the aspirations of the majority of Filipino women, however, is another issue altogether.

The laws enumerated below are only those, which specifically mention women's right as a sector [sic] to be represented in public fora.

- > **1987 Philippine Constitution:** The Constitution is the highest law in the country and on which all national laws are based. Equality between women and men is explicitly stated in Article 2 (State Policies), section 14:

The State recognizes the role of women in nation-building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men.

- > **Local Government Code of 1991:** The thesis of this law is greater participation of people in development through providing more spaces at the local levels. Spaces for women's representation in local development councils were specifically provided for in Section 41 (c):

In addition thereto, there shall be one (1) *sectoral representative from the women*, one (1) from the workers, and one (1) from any of the following sectors: the urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, disabled persons, or any sector as may be determined by the sanggunian concerned within ninety (90) days prior to the holding

of the next local elections, as may be provided for by law. The Comelec shall promulgate the rules and regulations to effectively provide for the election of such sectoral representative. [italics supplied]

- > **Indigenous People's Rights Act:** Similar to the Local Government Code, this law also provided for increased women's representation in social, political, economic and cultural spheres in indigenous communities.

Sec. 26. Women – ICC/IP [indigenous Cultural communities / Indigenous Peoples] women shall enjoy equal rights and opportunities with men, as regards the social, economic, political and cultural spheres of life. The participation of indigenous women in the decision-making process in all levels, as well as in the development of society, shall be given due respect and recognition.

- > **Women in Nation Building Act:** An act promoting the integration of women as full and equal partners of men in development and nation building. One of the most significant provisions of this law is the creation of a Gender and Development (GAD) Budget among all government agencies and units that will be used to address gender inequality. This law has become the fundamental basis for the GAD mainstreaming within the bureaucracy, that is now being used by civil society groups as a governance advocacy.
- > **Party List System Law:** Similar to the Local Government Code, this law opened new avenues for women's participation in formal public decision-making processes i.e. in the House of Representatives. This is explicitly stated in Section 5 that defines which groups can run as party list.

Any organized group of person may register as a party, organization or coalition for purposes of the party list system by filing with the COMELEC not later than ninety (90) days before the election

a petition verified by its president or secretary stating its desire to participate in the party-list system as a national, regional or sectoral party or organization or a coalition of such parties or organizations, attaching thereto its constitution, by-laws, platform or program of government, list of officers, coalition agreement and other relevant information as the COMELEC may require: Provided, That the sectors shall include labor, peasant, fisherfolk, urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, elderly, handicapped, *women*, youth, veterans, overseas workers and professionals. [italics supplied]

It is also important to note other national laws that, while not explicit of their intent of increasing women's political participation, nevertheless do so by addressing the gender-based discrimination which are barriers to women's empowerment. These include laws promoting gender equality with regard to access to resources, and education and training opportunities. Violence against women, another form of gender-based discrimination limiting women's political participation, are also addressed in existing laws against rape, sexual harassment and abuse of women by their intimate partners.

Women in Electoral Politics: Current Numbers and Trends:

Data on the Philippine population serves as the starting point of the discussion on current numbers and trends of women in politics. It is estimated that the Philippine population stood at close to 84 million in 2005. Almost half of this number (49.6 per cent) is female. Thus ideally, if there is to be a proportional number of women representatives in legislative bodies in relation to the group it is supposed to represent (i.e. women) then the ratio of male to female legislators is 1:1.

However, this is not the case. As statistics from the National Statistical Coordination

Board⁵² show, women are very much a minority in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.

President and Vice President:

The Philippines became a Republic in 1898 when it declared its freedom from Spanish colonizers. Since then, there have been 14 presidents of the Republic which included two women in its roster, Corazon C. Aquino (1986-1992) and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001-2004, 2004 to present). Both women assumed the key national leadership via popular uprising, also known as People Power, or EDSA revolutions II and I, respectively. However, because Macapagal-Arroyo only succeeded then president Joseph Estrada when he was ousted from presidency in 2001, she was still eligible to run for the 2004 presidential elections. Macapagal-Arroyo did, and won amidst continuing accusations of electoral fraud.

Macapagal-Arroyo is also the only female to date to have held the position of Vice President in the country.

Senate:

The first female senator was elected in 1946, in the person of Geronima Pecson. This was the first Senate convened after World War II and after the Filipino women got the vote in 1937. Pecson was the only female in the eight-member Senate. After this, a woman or women have always been elected to this legislative body, except in the years 1955 and 1969. The highest percentage of women in the Senate was 25 percent in the 1967 and 2004 elections.

No Senate elections were held in the years 1949-1954 and 1978 to 1986.

52 All statistical data and tables are drawn from the NSCB website, <http://www.nscb.gov.ph/activestats/gender/publicad/publicad.asp> (accessed last 07 October 2006)

Beyond Numbers: Women in Politics:

A measure that is being forwarded in Congress is the institutionalization of a gender quota. There is a House Bill filed by the Party-List Akbayan! to this effect. Known as the Gender Balance Bill, it aims to strengthen women's participation in elective and appointive positions in the government by instituting a minimum of 30 per cent representation of women in these spheres.

However, women's physical presence in legislative bodies is only one indicator of women's political empowerment. Another aspect – and which is more critical – is the *quality* of their participation; in human rights language, substantive participation. This refers mainly to two concerns: The first relates to the representation of women's issues and perspectives, while the second is about the political clout and influence of women within legislature to push for women's issues and perspectives.

These concerns can be quantitatively measured by, among others, tracking gender-specific or related bills filed and the leadership positions assumed by women politicians within Congress. Here, the findings from the studies of Tancangco (1992) and Mina Roces (2000) are relevant. Both scholars noted the low number of gender-specific bills filed in the House of Representatives and Senate, and even lower still, the number of gender-specific bills that were passed into law. Interestingly, Roces also observed that in the 10th Congress, men filed more Senate bills than women in the Committee of Women and Family Relations. Rather than a gendered pattern, apparently women senators often champion issues along the field of their expertise.

Tancangco observed the same among the women senatorial candidates in 1987. While political leanings and the official stance of their parties are evident in their platforms, a feminist perspective on social issues was

absent from the electoral agenda of women candidates.

In general, studies and articles on women in electoral politics that there is gender bias in politics. This is manifested in the following ways:

- > Gendered role expectations the greater pressure on women to balance work responsibilities with home and family caring
- > Traditional paths to a political career (e.g. law) are male-dominated. In the Philippines, a career in show business, media or sports has also become a viable path to politics, however this has worked more for male than females.
- > The strong foothold of men in the political arena given their longer years of participation in politics. Thus systems and processes within the legislature are still male-defined to which women must conform to.
- > Tracking of women politicians into addressing social welfare issues while men deal with the "hard" issues of national budgets, political reforms and security, to name a few, is also a manifestation of gender bias. Scanning House committee leadership in the present Congress would reveal this trend, apart from the fact that there are very few women in leadership positions. Out of the 58 standing committees in the House of Representatives, women chair only five. These are the committees on Higher Education and Technical Education, Interparliamentary Relations and Diplomacy, Public Information, Social Services and Women.

In the Senate, women chaired only six out of the 35 standing committees. These are the committees on Cultural Communities, Energy, Environment and Natural Resources, Foreign Relations, Health and Demography, and Youth, Women and Family Relations.

Gender stereotyping, however, can work both ways. Essentialism in politics sees women as peacemakers and nurturers; women thus are perceived to be able to contribute much to reforming “dirty” politics. The popular notion is that politics is “dirty” and are meant mainly for men. This perception has affected many women leaders who are regarded in the women’s movements and civil society organizations as having the potential for decisive and direct engagement in electoral politics.

In a survey of the UP College of Public Administration⁵³ respondents who replied that they would vote for a female gave their reasons as: “women are more responsible”, “women have no vices”, “women are not corrupt or are less corrupt than men”, and “women are more sincere”. This essentialist view tends to negate the fact that there are women legislators/politicians who are caught in the masculinist frame in their thinking and attitude. As an advocate notes, one’s genitalia does not automatically equate to one’s consciousness. Gender responsiveness is a political decision and an ideological stance that goes beyond sex.

Another way stereotyping has worked for women politicians is the popular (albeit perversely popular) that a “real” gentleman would be more accommodating to women. Conversely, female politicians who are strong in their opinions and aggressive in their positioning are regarded as “one of the boys.” Related to this, Roces cites *cariño* and *lambing* as part of women politician’s “powerful weapons” as they navigate and negotiate the macho culture of politics.⁵⁴ *Cariño* and *lambing* are generally perceived to be gender-specific traits or characteristics, i.e., male politicians cannot use the same *cariño* and *lambing* lest they be seen as homosexuals. (On the other hand, when men use related traits, these are often called “good negotiating skills” or “charisma”.) The

same study also notes that a male politician verbally humiliating or insulting his woman colleague risks losing public esteem.

However it can also be said that this gentleman’s accommodation is only to the extent that the bills being pushed do not counter the male privilege. Illustrative examples in this regard are women’s experiences in lobbying for laws on anti-rape and the anti-violence against women, which took some eight years before they were passed, and the anti-trafficking law that took around nine years before passage.

Gender politics is clearly a critical concern when women engage in electoral politics. However, other identities or affiliations of women must also be looked into if their realities are to be truly represented and addressed in this arena. Socio-economic class, that includes education and training – and how this translates to women’s access to resources, has divided women. Philippine politics is still characterized by patronage that often entails having the three Gs – goons, guns and gold or the 3Ps (pay-offs, power and patronage).

It is not surprising therefore that even if there are spaces within the electoral system provided by law, marginalized groups including women are still not able to participate in it in a substantive manner. A cursory look at the profile of women representatives would reveal that they generally belong to the upper socio-economic classes and/or political dynasties. This pattern is already recognizable even during the lobby for Filipino women’s suffrage i.e., at the forefront of the campaign are elite women who belong to landed families, and were well educated, with some even studying abroad. Another feature that would be interesting to look into is these women’s political background. It is also a trend that women candidates belong to political clans, and are fielded as replacement to their fathers, spouses or male relatives whose terms have expired.

53 n.d., cited in Tancangco 1992 (p. 82–83)

54 Roces 2000 (p. 106)

The above discussion serves to highlight another dimension in the discussion of women in politics: women do participate in politics, but do they represent or lobby for a women's agenda? And if they claim to represent women, which group of women? While it is recognized that women are marginalized in society because of their gender, there are groups of women who face multiple discrimination because of their gender and socio-economic and cultural identities, among others.

In this sense, the party list system has become a critical avenue for women's political participation, in terms of ensuring that their agenda as a group are represented and lobbied within Congress. At the very least, party-list organizations can influence the quality of the debates among legislators – if not yet the quality of outcomes – by bringing to the discussion the perspective of the marginalized groups they represent.⁵⁵ In this sense, it was observed that a political party system itself in the country is yet to be fully realized. Traditional political parties often do not operate on the basis of party platforms or agenda, but rather revolve around political personalities. There is also the party-switching tactics of many politicians that often occur not because of political principles but rather as a convenient way to assure patronage and winnability. The current crop of candidates for the 2007 senatorial elections is the most glaring example of this. Put together, this gender-inhospitable political landscape in which women compete for a public office quite naturally impacts on the participation of women in electoral politics; moreover, there are only a few prominent women in the political scene that can then influence parties and political agenda.⁵⁶

As previously mentioned, there have already been two woman-specific party list

organizations in Congress, Abanse Pinay! and GABRIELA Women's Party (GWP). Akbayan! which identifies itself as feminist is also a party list organization that won three seats in the House of Representatives for this Congress. Some of the gender-specific bills that were sponsored by the two party list organizations included those on reproductive health, gender quota in electoral posts, promoting breastfeeding, anti-discrimination based on sexual orientation, and anti-prostitution. Promotion of human rights and human rights education are in the list of bills authored by Akbayan! and GWP.

Transforming the Terrain: Working from the Outside:

Fielding candidates is only one way that women's groups and formations have engaged electoral politics – and perhaps the most difficult. Often the resource needs (both human and material) outweigh the potential gains for the women's agenda, if there is indeed, in Congress. Thus, when Abanse Pinay decided to run for second term, winning a seat was only a secondary objective. The primary motivation was to maximize the space provided by the elections for nationwide information and education on women's issues.⁵⁷

In some ways, this sentiment reflects the general stance of women on electoral politics: they would rather work from the outside. Pressure politics in the form of community organizing and mobilizations around national and sectoral issues is one way that women's formations have traditionally engaged political processes.

The 1990s saw new avenues for women's participation in politics. First is through legislative advocacy which entailed working with policy-makers to forward laws addressing women-specific issues. Notable in this regard was the *Sama-samang Inisyatiba*

⁵⁵ Interview with Romeo C. Dongeto, Executive Director, PLCPD, 19 September 2006.

⁵⁶ Interview with Karen Tañada, Executive Director of GZO Peace Institute, member of the Abanse Pinay Party List, 15 November 2006. Tañada however also admits that party-lists cannot always be hardliners in their "NGO" methods in Congress.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

ng Kababaihan sa Pagbabago ng Batas at Lipunan (SIBOL, loosely translated as Women's Collective Initiative to Change the Law and Society)) which was formed in 1992. The SIBOL network was composed of several women's organizations, community-based groups and individuals who are committed to promoting women's human rights through law. Its stance can be summarized as: (1) there are laws that protect women, and women should know and use them; (2) there are laws that are anti-women thus should be repealed; and (3) women should proactively lobby for laws that address their issues. Although lobbying for gender-responsive laws and policies at the national and local levels comprises the bulk of the network's engagement with the political processes, its major strategies also include "street-based protest actions against legislative and electoral measures that are anti-women and anti-people".⁵⁸

The adoption of gender and development (GAD) mainstreaming as the main government strategy to promote gender equality also provided a vehicle for women's groups to integrate their agenda within legislative bodies in local government units, and the bureaucracy. GAD mainstreaming complements the 1991 Local Government Code that provided for women's representation as a *sector* to local development councils. Various ways that women's groups have engaged local governments through gender mainstreaming are as lobbyists for gender-specific local legislation, trainers in capability building activities, consultants for programs and projects if not direct implementers of such.

58 Women's Legal Bureau 1997 (3)

20 Women and Budget Advocacy



Women and budget advocacy has to date, remained in the realm of (a) advocacy on monitoring the national budget, specifically in the way that budgets for social services is being allocated; and (b) advocacy on and monitoring the government's GAD mainstreaming effort.

Advocacy on monitoring the budget:

There are only a few organizations that have made advocacy of the budget as a key program. One of these is the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC). The FDC is composed of over 50 coalitions/ alliances, academic institutions and programs, women's groups, civil society organizations and community based groups that cut across sectoral focus and ideological or political lines. The FDC networks with the following networks: In the area of Energy: Department of Energy

(DoE), National Power Corporation (NPC), Transmission Corporation (Transco) Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management (PSALM), Corporation Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC), National Electrification Administration (NEA), and the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market (WESM). In the areas of Economic and Fiscal Matters: Department of Budget and Management (DBM), National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), Department of Finance (DOF), and the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP or Central Bank of the Philippines). The FDC also consistently lobbies the Senate and House of Representatives in terms of issues that it promotes and monitors. Transparency and accountability are two major pillars of FDC's advocacies.

Depending on its current focus, the FDC shifts its emphasis; of late has been focused on basic services such as water, shelter, poverty and employment, and as the

network's name suggests on advocacy related to debt and how the government regards the external debt issue – an issue that has impact on the way that the national budget is being structured and allocated. The most recent foci of its advocacy have been on water, power and debt. FDC President Ana Maria R. Nemenzo, said, “Arroyo is undermining our democratic processes. She treats our national budget like a cookie jar where she can just dip her filthy hands whenever she wants to,” adding that the “power of the purse” belongs to the legislative, not the executive, department.”

FDC together with Social Watch Philippines and other civil society networks supported and won the re-channeling of the controversial P4.7 billion school-feeding program to finance the building of additional classrooms, distribution of nutritional supplements and hiring of more teachers. The administration and its allies in the Lower House had originally introduced this school-feeding program under the Department of Education allocation, but this was exposed to be in fact a rice distribution scheme thus raising suspicion it would be used for indirect vote-buying at the coming May 2007 elections.

FDC, with support from other networks, also does a number of advocacy activities related to what it has termed democratic governance. Included in this program are the issues of government action or inaction on disaster management and environmental crises that have besieged the Philippines in the last few years, such as massive flooding and destruction of communities caused by environmental damage.

(Source: <http://www.freedomfromdebtcoalition.org/main/pages/gmabudget1.php>, 19 Feb 2007)

As a general rule, most women's groups that undertake women and governance advocacy take a long view and therefore are engaged as well with the issue of national budget, allocation and the debt issue. Given

the history of the women's movement in the country, a number of women's groups that have emerged out of social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, have don on a critical perspective on the way that the State as a whole is managing not only the economy but as a main focus, the way that administrations allocate budgets. Trained in developing an analytic frame that looks comprehensively at the socio-cultural, political and economic dimensions of analysis, many women's groups are able to negotiate their advocacies based on their specific mandate and contextualized within national-level or macro level issues, such as budget or the debt question. As well, many women's groups undertake lobby work with the senate and House of Representatives when their sectoral concerns are being discussed in budget hearings. Public hearings on issues such as basic services, agriculture, political issues, to cite a few, are occasions for women's groups to make their presence felt. There are a number of them to list down.

Advocacy on and monitoring the government's GAD mainstreaming effort:

The activism of women in both politics and governance has taken off in a dramatic way after the demise of the martial law regime. This was due to several factors, one of which was the feeling of a more liberal democratic space, and for many, a desire to help in rebuilding particularly the formal institutions of democracy that were either mangled or dismantled by the authoritarian Marcos rule. While in the end, Corazon C. Aquino, the president that took over after 1986, may have squandered the opportunities that a post-authoritarian regime offered her administration, it would be fair, nonetheless, to suggest that the women's movement had found a breathing space in which to also rebuild itself. Governance became an arena for struggle and advocacy. Women entered or got appointed to some top posts in the bureaucracy; training institutes for women and

governance were set up; civil society groups actively promoted governance as an agenda for transformative politics. Donor agencies also became a push for this trajectory of social engagement for the NGOs. On the other hand, the more militant women's groups, community-based organizations and others had stayed away from being too close with the government, and the issue of "reform or revolution" was a debate that haunted and continues to haunt the women's movement and as a whole other social movements.

This activism resulted, to a degree, to the representation of women in various governmental institutions and agencies. In some instances, sectoral representation has been achieved in regional and national bodies (e.g., the National Anti-Poverty Commission or NAPC, Regional Coordinating Councils of provinces), thus expanding the governance advocacy of the women's movement. How women's agenda, if any, and how gender-responsive inputs is taken and policies are implemented is another issue altogether.

One of the affirmative actions being addressed is the gender quota bill that would ensure women are given the spaces to exercise their leadership and governance. While we see the gains of having a gender quota as we put more women in politics, it is also a challenge for us to put women who understand and will carry the women's agenda. The Magna Carta for Women, the legislative articulation of CEDAW has been deliberated on by both legislative houses, and is awaiting the opening of the next Congress. It is not a perfect bill, as the current administration refuses, at all cost, to exclude any provision on reproductive rights. Hence this remains to the women's movement a continuing arena of struggle.

The women's movement's advocacy framed in gender-based empowerment and women's rights has been the push for policies and programs addressing women specifically. The state's recognition on the role of women in nation building is a big leap towards attaining

a society that at the policy level acknowledges no gender responsiveness. One key initiative that had expanded women's advocacy in governance was the promulgation of the GAD mainstreaming policy. Under the oversight of the NCRFW, the policy mandates all government agencies to include a GAD budget, pegged at least five percent of its total budget. GAD mainstreaming is the main strategy for ensuring that the government pursues gender equality in all aspects of the development process to achieve the vision of a gender-responsive society where women and men equally contribute to and benefit from development. It is a set of processes and strategies aimed at recognizing and addressing gender issues in legislation, policies, programs and projects and institutional mechanisms of the government on a sustained basis. It is essentially institutionalizing gender concerns in the mainstream development processes and agenda and not just in the peripheral programs and projects of the government. (NCRFW, 2004)

The following policy documents are the bases for GAD mainstreaming:

- > RA 7192 (1992) Women in Nation-Building and Development Act. This states that 5% of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) must be provided for women's needs.
- > Executive Order 273 (1995). Philippine Plan for Gender and Development (PPGD) which states that the GAD budget must be included in the General Appropriations Act (GAA) or in the national budget
- > Sec 7, RA 7845 (1995). Through the general Appropriations Act, national agencies are asked to allot 5% of their budget (following RA 7192) for women.
- > Local Budget Memorandum #28 (1998). GAD budget's minimum provision is 5% of the national budget

- > Joint Circular DBM, NEDA, NCRFW (2001). Implementation of gender mainstreaming and institutionalization of GAD programs in all national and local government agencies.
- > Joint Memorandum Circular, DILG-DBM and NCRFW (2001). This shows a schema on how the LGUs, from barangay level up to the regional level shall make the GAD Plan and its budgeting.

Women's groups, buoyed by the opportunity of making the policy serves its purpose of empowering women, apart from advocacy and networking, have been doing a number of things to make GAD mainstreaming work especially for poor and marginalized groups of women. A number of women's groups, particularly those with community-based partners and networks have been working with LGUs, in the hope of making the GAD budget work for their constituents (e.g., CARET, Akbayan).

There are reports that accessing the GAD budget is not as easy as some may have thought. Several factors affect women's capacity to access the budget, some of these are: (a) inhospitable LGUs that do not see the role of NGOs in GAD mainstreaming; (b) the GAD budget is mainly used for the internal needs of the LGUs; (c) NGOs lack the capacity to access the budget due to their lack of knowledge about the planning process of the LGUs – when, how, and where they can make their inputs as advantageously as possible. There are LGUs that have put up their GAD council or GAD committees through which women's groups or civil society groups need to go through if they want a share of the pie. Hence, getting into official GAD focal points/council or committees has been seen as another avenue through which GAD mainstreaming can be utilized to empower women especially those in poorer communities. There are those groups who are perceived as too radical or belonging to the Left, are altogether fenced off from GAD mainstreaming efforts by local government units. At the national level, key departments

and agencies of government are difficult to lobby since they are focused at national level, and the scale of their operations are such that the would-be efforts at doing advocacy work with them is deemed a large-scale operation that daunts many women's groups which by and large are smaller in operational terms. (A much-articulated report on GAD mainstreaming is being developed for another collaborative study between IPD and WEDPRO, which will come out in late March or early April 2007.)

A study by the NCRFW states that only 0.49 percent of the allotted 5 percent of the GAA budget goes to GAD. Among the 140 agencies that submitted their GAD budget to the Commission, only 33 agencies have satisfied the 5 percent required GAD budget (NCRFW, 2004). Since 2000, the downward trend in the GAD budget can be noticed. The report further states "In 1999 we got 3.42 billion and it was lowered by 4 percent leaving the next year's budget with 3.28 billion. The same thing happened in the following year and was cut by 14.6 percent leaving only 2.8 billion." In 1995, only 5 percent of the total 319 agencies in the country followed the said mandate.

By and large, women's advocacy on the budget is a relatively new arena for intervention. Indeed, this is an important advocacy, but as an urban poor woman commented: "I can't see the point of monitoring the national budget or GAD when my family's stomach is grinding hunger pangs." Perhaps making sense of women's advocacy on the budget at the national level would only make real sense to this urban poor woman and million more, when there is food on the table, clothing on one's back and a shelter where these issues could be discussed with vigor and passion.

21 Where Do We Go From Here? The Challenges and Next Steps

The paper presented only a broad sweep of the trends and concerns with regard to women's participation in electoral politics. There are three main areas explored by the paper: the engagement of women in politics as legislators, the quality of these women's participation and representation of women's realities and perspectives, and the extent of their influence within the legislature. In all areas, it was shown that much has yet to be achieved before they reflect equality of women and men in politics. Clearly, it is not enough to respond to this gender disparity by increasing women politicians. Strategic actions directed at building women's capacities to engage in politics and lobby for women's human rights concerns are needed as well. To do this, women's political participation must be documented to better identify the support they need. Likewise, addressing the broader context of gender stereotyping and gender-based discrimination within legislative bodies is also necessary if gender-responsiveness of policies and programs instituted is a goal of women engaging in electoral politics.

Education and organizing outside formal legislative venues is also a crucial aspect of strengthening women's participation in electoral politics. The data on voting patterns is telling in this regard: although more women go out to vote than men, women do not necessarily vote for women. It is also unlikely that many of them consider the stand of candidates and political parties on gender issues. On the other hand, many mainstream women politicians are not conscious of the potential role they could play in promoting gender issues and women's rights. While it is true that the reasons for this is more complex than simply women having no gender consciousness, it may be taken as a starting point to organize a women's vote and ensure that politicians – whether female or male – become accountable to their women constituents.

At this point too it should be underscored that the electoral arena is only one area of women's politics and where their empowerment is critical. A critique of limiting the discussion on women in politics to their engagement in national electoral politics (and maybe electoral politics in general) to push for a gender agenda is that it excludes women marginalized over and above gender considerations, for instance, urban and rural poor women, indigenous women and Muslim women. Although there are recognized leaders among their ranks, their influence is generally localized and heavily constricted by cultural and structural forces that have kept them at the margins of national development in the first place.

Politics in its broadest sense refers to leadership and decision-making – i.e. who leads? who takes part in the decision-making? what is the process? and who decides? These concerns cannot be addressed by simply extending to women the right to vote and hold political office. Substantive changes leading to women's empowerment in the areas of economics, culture and even at the personal or family level must also take place.⁵⁹ Without these, women in politics would always be referring to privileged women who by virtue of their wealth, connections, education, beauty or popularity are able to engage in and exert influence on formal spaces of political power.⁶⁰

Consciously integrating economics, culture and personal or family level empowerment thus broadens the scope of what is meant by women in politics, and what yet remains to be done to have more women in politics. Some

59 Gita Sen in "Women, Power and Politics", DAWN Reader, DAWN Training Institute, Bangalore India 14 September – 03 October 2003.

60 A thesis of Mina Roces's book, *Women, Power and Kinship Politics: Female Power in Post-War Philippines*, is Filipino women engage politics formally (being an elective or appointed official) and informally (being a wife, daughter relative of an elective or appointed male official). It is often the case that women become visible in public spaces through their involvement in projects expected of a wife of a politician (informal). Eventually, some of these women will also run for public office (formal).

of the implications of this conceptualization of politics are the following:

- > Women have always been involved in politics, yet their contributions and influence have been ignored, trivialized or undocumented. There is also need to look into spaces beyond electoral politics, and where women may have been more actively participating as leaders and decision makers. Examples of these are in the local government units, community-based groups, and civil society organizations.
- > All political issues are women's issues, and it is critical that their perspective and experiences are considered and integrated in the discussions and actions to address these issues. For instance, what are the implications of the proposed Charter Change on women's status in society? Oddly enough, national debates on the issue are silent in this regard.⁶¹
- > Transformative politics is necessarily an engendered politics. Traditional politics and characterized by patronage and violence, and frameworks informing governance, must be scrutinized of its gender biases.
- > The political sphere encompasses both the so-called "private" or "personal" sphere and the "public" sphere. Where does the private and public interface? Again, adopting the broad meaning of politics, enables one to see that the larger part of women's political engagement lies in their struggle with "everyday politics". Simply put, these are the interfaces between the so-called private or personal dimensions of women's lives, and the public spheres – assertions and negotiations

of women within their immediate circles of family and communities for their participation in decision-making.

There are sections among women's formations that take a much more cynical view of women's engagement with some formal structures, processes and mechanisms of government that pertain to women's issues and gender concerns. Despite this, it is also a well-documented fact that to some extent women's critical collaboration with the State is a necessary step for women's empowerment. After all, until the State is completely transformed and its instrumentalities reshaped according to what progressive social movements, blocs or political parties call a pro-people, pro-poor, democratic and sovereign nation – and add women's agenda for women's empowerment and gender equality – participation in mainstream politics which includes electoral politics is here to stay. What is important is to ensure that engagements with the State and its machinery, mechanisms especially for women's empowerment, whether by women's organizations or other civil society formations, are transparent and accountable to the communities they have chosen to serve.

The NCRFW, though weak and small, and currently very much perceived as a tool of the Arroyo administration for its own political agenda, has been in the past, a mechanism through which women's advocacies have found allies and supporters. After all, women's engagements with the NCRFW, particularly during the post-martial law years, were premeditated political actions that brought women's concerns to the table of government. In the area of women's participation, studies point out:

Through the NCRFW and its national agencies, the government adopted measures to enhance women's participation in decision-making and make the political culture more gender-responsive. These include the following: (a) leadership training for local political female leaders; (b) training on

61 A cursory glance at mass media (newspaper, television and radio) for instance show that these often do not include the gender dimensions of the proposed change even while some of the proposed Charter provisions will clearly impact women as a group. Examples of this are the removal of provisions ensuring the right to health and the ban on the entry of foreign troops and military bases without a treaty (See Pepito Frias's two-part article, "Shall We Dance?" for more information on the proposed Charter Change and human rights)

gender-responsive management, gender planning, and budgeting; (c) advocating for more women electoral candidates; (d) providing welfare support services for rural and grassroots women who wish to enter politics; and (e) researching to identify models of gender-responsive management and leadership.

Implementing these planned actions was facilitated by the issuance of laws and executive orders. These laws encouraged both national and local (e.g. provincial, municipal, city and village) units to allocate seats for women in policy and management bodies and allocate funds for developing and implementing women's programs. As a result, numerous activities were carried out between 1996 to 2003 to raise female leaders' awareness of women's different problems and give these leaders the capacity to develop policies and programs to address these issues.

All throughout the last decade, many women's groups also worked hard to reach out to women politicians. They conducted gender sensitivity seminars and workshops on gender responsive planning, budgeting and monitoring. They organized advocacy forums on such topics as domestic violence, sex trafficking, and reproductive health.

In 1995, a coalition of women's groups was formed primarily to monitor government performance in addressing the 12 areas of concern in the BPA. In 2000, a national conference was organized for a mid-decade assessment of gains, gaps, and remaining challenges, and to agree on common initiatives to step up the implementation of the country's GAD programs. As it has been in previous review processes (e.g. the assessment of outcomes of the Nairobi Women's World Conference), the NCRFW incorporated some of the NGOs' observations in the government report.⁶²

The perception that the concept of "gender" depoliticizes "women's" issues and the feminist may be a false dichotomy. Gender mainstreaming, as the term suggests, is bringing the power relations between women and men – a feminist agenda undoubtedly – into the arena of policy and governance, i.e., mainstream politics. That policy and governance as the main teeth that anchor women and men's situation into the social, cultural and economic environment that governs their lives is a **key** political question. The perception that gender mainstreaming is merely and primarily concerned with gender sensitivity training or GST is a bastardization of the concept.

What is more important to focus on is to develop a comprehensive critique of the existing gender and development mainstreaming efforts by government, and thus bring in the issue of patriarchy in government policies and programs for the people, and particularly for the most marginalized and discriminated sectors of society in all spheres and all levels of social, political and economic environments.

The analysis of how capitalism and patriarchy weave together and impact on the productive and reproductive spheres of people's lives, and especially women who continue to bear the brunt of multiple burdens, and how the State has governed these spheres and within the various levels of governance, are the key questions that gender and development mainstreaming must address. Given this, social movements including the women's movement(s) have the fundamental task of insisting that GAD mainstreaming address the issues of production and reproduction as a major arena of governance – overwhelming poverty, lack of social services especially health and education, violence against women, children and other vulnerable sectors of the population, discriminatory labor policies that marginalize women's economic contributions, lack of employment opportunities that push women and men into migrant work that demeans and devalues their

62 Sobritchea, n.d.

humanity, among others. In the end, these are the rights to development, human security and basic freedoms. What women do with this policy of GAD mainstreaming, an opportunity to dialogue and debate with and make the State and its machinery accountable, is really an issue of strategic political will.

Several women's formations have through the years engaged government, among which are the Centre for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP), the Center for Legislative Development (CLD), the Women Involved in Nation-Building (WIN), Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, Women's Crisis Center, Reproductive Health Advocacy Network (RHAN), SIBOL, a feminist coalition of 12 women's organizations, to cite a few.

For some, another significant result of the advocacy to promote gender equality has been many sectors' earnest efforts to again form all-women political parties. A significant outcome of the various initiatives to increase women's participation in politics was the heightened interest of women's groups to formally register as political parties, field candidates, and make women's issues electoral issues. While some are committed to transforming the male-centered nature of Philippine politics and governance, others are simply committed to increasing the number of women politicians. Six all-women parties participated in the last national elections in 1998: the Abanse! Pinay (Onward, Filipina!), the Ang Bagong Pilipina (The New Filipina), the BABAYI (Advocates for Women and Nation), GLOW (Gloria's League of Women), the National Council of Women in the Philippines (NCWP), and the WOMENPOWER, Inc.⁶³

Shortlived KAIBA, Abanse! Pinay and the Gabriela Women's Party are unabashedly proud of their agenda for women's empowerment and gender equality, with their supporters and constituents drawn largely from their organized communities

and politicized allies. On the whole, their efforts have been what may be termed "transformational politics." On the other hand, GLOW was organized around the political agenda and leadership of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo who was then running for vice-president. The National Council of Women in the Philippines (NCWP), the country's oldest women's organization, claims to have some 10 million female members and hundreds of affiliate organizations like the Girl Scouts of the Philippines and Catholic Women's League. Its agenda is to ensure that women's programs are integrated into government plans and that "communities enjoy the wholeness of life that includes access to basic services and protection of rights."⁶⁴

Awarding outstanding women leaders, gender-responsive local government units, and projects – the formal recognition of good leadership – has been a strategy in increasing women's participation in politics and influencing male politicians to promote gender equality programs. While this has not been assessed in terms of effectiveness and sustainability, some quarters see this as having created a wholesome competition among local leaders to address gender issues in their localities. The Institute for Politics and Governance (IPG) has instituted an annual event awarding women leaders in politics. Even the cultural arena has been explored. For the past few years, the government of Quezon City has given an annual award for the most gender-sensitive films.

A smart-alecky type of response when asked how male-dominated social movements may be brought over to women's feminist agenda is to institute an awards-giving body that cites and promotes the women's agenda in such social movements.

A scholar posits that "[t]here is every reason to believe that social movements have served as critical alternatives to the lethargy and

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

lack of inventiveness of national politics.”⁶⁵ This challenge remains so true when it comes to its relationship with its twin sister, the women’s movement(s). Many participants in the conversations, especially those belonging to “broad” and “mixed” social movements, clearly articulated the gaps and challenges when it came to the issue of women’s feminist agenda.

In light of this, do women find it necessary to build their own political bloc?

If they do, what would make it different from other such formations? What do the experiences of all-women political parties teach us? Why are women joining political blocs, political parties and social movements that clearly have yet to fully develop their keen understanding of the nexus of feminism and social change – and practice it in the day-to-day life of the organizations? Does the feminist agenda truly have a chance to survive the overwhelming macro politics that dominate the discourses of political blocs, parties and social movements? These questions continue to hound the activists of this generation, and the younger women are continuing to seek the answers from their foremothers and older sisters. But perhaps, the answers lie in their own experiences, and while the lessons of the past are important legacies, the past had its own dynamism, its own set of problems, its own set of strategies that cannot continue to cast a shadow over the need for a new set of answers. If socialist feminism is a genuine ideological frame in which the new sets of answers could be found by younger women and those needing a frame in which to build their activist scaffoldings, then the lessons are there for those who have the temperament to be instructed by the historical lessons. As Rosa Luxemburg once said: “We will be victorious if we have not forgotten how to learn.” Finally it is important to remember:

▶ *There is a fundamental interconnection between women’s struggle and what is traditionally conceived as class struggle. Not all women’s struggles have an inherently anti-capitalist thrust (particularly not those which seek only to advance the power and wealth of special groups of women), but all those which build collectivity and collective confidence among women are vitally important to the building of class consciousness. Conversely, not all class struggles have an inherently anti-sexist thrust (especially not those that cling to pre-industrial patriarchal values) but all those which seek to build the social and cultural autonomy of the working class are necessarily linked to the struggle for women’s liberation.”⁶⁶ ◀*

This paper presents only a broad sweep of the trends and concerns regarding women in relation to politics first as legislators, then as members of social movements engaging the State for institutional changes that are gender-responsive and empowering in a holistic sense. In all areas, it was shown that much has yet to be achieved before gender equality in politics is achieved. Clearly, it is not enough to respond to this gender disparity by increasing women politicians. Strategic actions directed at building women’s capacities to engage in politics and lobby for women’s human rights concerns are needed as well. To do this, women’s political participation must be documented to better identify the support they need. Likewise, addressing the broader context of gender stereotyping and gender-based discrimination within legislative bodies is also necessary if the institution of gender-responsive policies and programs is a goal of women engaging in electoral politics.

Education and organizing outside formal legislative venues are also crucial aspects in strengthening women’s participation in

66 Barbara Ehrenreich, “What is Socialist Feminism?”; <http://www.cwluherstory.com/CWLUArchive/socialfem.html>; This article was first published in WIN Magazine in 1976. It later appeared in *Working Papers on Socialism & Feminism* published by the New American Movement (NAM) in 1976.

65 Ayres, in Kasarinlan (volume 21, number 2, 2006): 137

electoral politics. The data on voting patterns is telling in this regard: although more women go out to vote than men, women do not necessarily vote for women. It is also unlikely that many of them consider the stand of candidates and political parties on gender issues. On the other hand, many mainstream women politicians are not conscious of the potential role they could play in promoting gender issues and women's rights. While it is true that the reasons for this is more complex than simply women having no gender consciousness, it may be taken as a starting point to organize a women's vote and ensure that politicians – whether female or male – become accountable to their women constituents.

At this point too it should be underscored that the electoral arena is only one area of women's politics and where their empowerment is critical. A critique of limiting the discussion on women in politics to their engagement in national electoral politics (and maybe electoral politics in general) to push for a gender agenda is that it excludes women marginalized over and above gender considerations, for instance urban and rural poor women, indigenous women and Muslim women. Although there are recognized leaders among their ranks, their influence is generally localized and heavily constricted by cultural and structural forces that have kept them at the margins of national development in the first place.

Consciously integrating economics, culture and personal or family level empowerment thus broadens the scope of what is meant by women in politics, and what yet remains to be done to have more women in politics. Some of the implications of this conceptualization of politics are the following:

- > Women have always been involved in politics, yet their contributions and influence have been ignored, trivialized or undocumented. There is also need to look into spaces beyond electoral politics, and where women may have

been more actively participating as leaders and decision makers. Examples of these are in the local government units, community-based groups, and civil society organizations.

- > All political issues are women's issues, and it is critical that their perspective and experiences be considered and integrated into the discussions and actions to address these issues. For instance, what are the implications of the proposed Charter Change on women's status in society? Oddly enough, national debates on the issue are silent in this regard.
- > Transformative politics is necessarily engendered politics. Traditional politics is characterized by patronage and violence, and frameworks informing governance must be scrutinized for gender biases.
- > The political sphere encompasses both the so-called "private" or "personal" sphere and the "public" sphere. Where do the private and the public interface? Again, adopting the broad meaning of politics enables one to see that the larger part of women's political engagement lies in their struggle with "everyday politics." Simply put, these are the interfaces between the so-called private or personal dimensions of women's lives, and the public spheres – assertions and negotiations of women within their immediate circles of family and communities for their participation in decision-making.

22 What Needs to Be Done?

With this in mind, the paper wishes to present several interrelated propositions that may be taken up by the women's movement. From probing the current political and discursive terrain of women's movement, it attempts to identify possible themes and tracks.

- 1. Conceiving women's struggles in the context of SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:** it is important at this juncture to reconnect with the movements. This requires grounding the women political project in women in movements, sectors and formations. One shared realization has to do with the limited organizing work that uses the women identity as a mobilizing frame. In this sense, developing a collective identity as women, that is for women in movements to identify themselves as women activists alongside their sectoral frame is key in sustaining political action.
- 2. Creating and sustaining venues for collective REFLECTION.** Strengthening the movement frame can be facilitated through sustained, deliberative processes of collective reflections that involve both women-specific formations and women in movements. There are indications that the movements are in a reflective mood, judging from the informal and formal exchanges that have been taking place in various fronts and fora. It is important that these processes are sustained, that exchanges are circulated to the wider public, that these are shared and owned by as many divergent communities as possible. Conversations and exchanges must be inclusive, and should consciously set out to involve as many groups and formations as possible to amplify and disseminate realizations, lessons and experiences.
- 3. Continuous work to come up with a framework that captures the multiple facets of women's struggle.** Processes of reflection within and among formations and movements should deliberately aim to develop a sharper, broader feminist frame. The need to grapple with the interconnections between class and gender has been stressed, as well as the need to bridge the divergent communities found within the wider constellation of the women's movements. The process of developing such a frame will serve as important scaffolding for creating a collective identity. The frame will provide a shared language that will link and consolidate previously distinct initiatives and separate struggles.
- 4. Connecting with LOCAL COMMUNITIES:** The push to go global, the conscious effort to ground interventions, compels one to sharpen and substantiate the frame. Local communities should be viewed as seedbeds that will allow the initial frame to grow. These interventions should be considered a necessary part of the process that will reveal textures and nuances that are not readily visible. The frame should be seen as a work in progress that is launched and circulated in various, concrete arenas of political engagement.
- 5. Collectively re-imagining women's movements.** There seems to be a need as well as a desire for more harmonization and coordination in the work and agenda of different formations and groups. Increased interaction among groups and formations will ensure that knowledge, lessons and experiences are shared, information about what is being done by whom can freely circulate, interventions can be implied. Such a formation does not need to be directed by a particular bloc or formation, in recognition of the values of diversity, plurality and autonomy. Here the metaphor of a constellation seems apt. Women organizations and formations can remain distinct, autonomous units while collectively striving to constitute a connected community, a collectively imagined cluster that can come together as a complex form.

Creating shared venues where women can nurture alternate communities outside of the blocs and formations that they are with can facilitate harmonization. The creation of these common spaces is underpinned by a more conscious effort for cross-fertilization of ideas and interventions. There may be a lot of past baggages that may hinder attempts to coordinate women's efforts. However, as earlier mentioned, there

have also been a lot of recent events that demonstrate a willingness to undertake such an effort. *Martsa ng Kababaihan*, *Pagkakaisa ng Kababaihan*, *TFSR*, *Welga ng Kababaihan* – these initiatives are not perfect, certainly wrought with their own set dynamics and lessons, but they nonetheless provide a glimpse of what women as a formation can achieve, and the potential of women as a political force.



23 Women in Electoral Politics and Legislature:

The Abanse! Pinay Case Study 1

Abanse! Pinay is a women's party-list group formed in 1997 with the aim to push for a women's agenda in the House of Representatives. By that time, the formators of Abanse! Pinay assessed that the situation was ripe for a women's political party. First, there was the 1995 Party List Law which enabled marginalized sectors to be represented in Congress. Although women as such do not constitute a "sector", there was already an acceptance in the country that women are marginalized on the basis of their gender, and thus have specific interests to represent in legislative branch of government.

Second, the 1990s saw the strengthening of feminist organizations which brought to fore the advocacy for women's participation in the public arena i.e., in decision-making spaces, from the community to the national level.

Third, and this was a reflection of feminists who eventually formed Abanse! Pinay, it is critical that feminists engage electoral politics to institutionalize policies and practices that are gender sensitive and responsive. While there have been significant gains with regard to campaigns against work discrimination, domestic violence and the like, women were "...still begging from the table of the patriarchs".

For some, it was also an issue of being consistent, and a natural progression of their work in inspiring women's political participation, as well as an experiment if they can put their feminist theories into practice:

► *The main line of activities is the training of women in entering politics, in identifying possible women leaders... in formation of a women's agenda. So in a sense, the way I saw it, we are just roaming around the periphery of politics but we were not involved, and I myself personally, I became uncomfortable that after so many*

years of inspiring these women to take leadership positions in local politics, we in PILIPINA did not even want to attempt to enter politics. So when the Party List Law was enacted, we said this is it, let's go for it. We will lose moral ascendancy over women if we ourselves are afraid to engage in electoral politics. We thought of the party list as venue to test our theory and idealism.

Thus Abanse! Pinay was established. Its immediate goal was to participate in the 1998 national elections and win seats in Congress. In more general terms, the objectives of Abanse! Pinay were to:⁶⁷

- (1) Develop, advocate for, and engender a women's agenda in the legislature and in governance. Issues and how they affect women's lives will be articulated and responded through legislation
- (2) To organize and develop a women's vote. Women and men will be mobilized to support the campaign of progressive women candidates, participate in crafting the women's agenda and engage other candidates to take a stand on priority issues that affect women's lives

Interestingly, some of the formators of Abanse! Pinay are members of multi-sectoral political blocs and lobbied in these spaces for the integration women's human rights issues and concerns. However, a common experience of these women was that gender issues would often be assumed under "broader concerns". Some felt frustrated that even the claim of representing half of the population in the communities, and in some cases, even majority of the members, seemed to be not enough reason to put a specific women's agenda in the political

67 "All About Abanse! Pinay Party List", a brochure on Abanse! Pinay.

bloc's platform. After much reflection and discussion, the women decided to form a women's party list group, Abanse! Pinay.

Ironically, though, many women, even feminists who strongly advocate for women's political participation, are wary, if not outright uncomfortable, of running for elective posts, and putting their hands into "dirty politics". Abanse! Pinay went into electoral politics not only carrying a women's platform, but also a call for transformative politics. It was clear to the members from the beginning that they will not play up to the traditional campaign tactics of goons, guns and gold (the so-called three G's of electoral politics). As one member put it, "*Kahit matalo tayo basta clean*". Being clean meant that the organization will not accept donations or support from traditional politicians ("trapos") and known anti-women personalities, even if Abanse! Pinay has only very limited funds and, they admitted, know-how in running a nationwide electoral campaign.

Lacking in resources and political machinery, the Abanse! Pinay instead sought creative means of "going after every vote", in addition to tapping support from their network of families and friends. An example of a creative method was "pyramiding", a strategy patterned after direct sales methods, and very familiar with women:

- ▶ *Abanse! Pinay will count on a core of 50 women (yes, just 50!) who will each convince 20 others to vote and organize Abanse! Pinay. Each of these 20 individuals will then talk to 15, each of the 15 to 10, each of the 10 to five, each of the five to two, and each of the two to one.* ◀

The media, in particular, was a strategic way of reaching out to many people in a short time. Although Abanse! Pinay did not have resources enough to pay for political advertisements, they still gained media coverage because they were active in the information dissemination of the party list

law.⁶⁸ Another way they promoted their party and its women's agenda is through attending events where they are invited as speakers. The month of March, which is also celebrated as the Women's Month, in particular, was a good time to "campaign". Because the members of Abanse! Pinay are well-known feminists and advocates of women's human rights, they would be invited in the many women's congresses, seminars, fora, and social functions during the month. On looking back, the members found it amusing that while some of them were also running for local government positions that election year, they promoted Abanse! Pinay more than themselves in their communities. One member recalled that after making a long pitch for Abanse! Pinay and the women's vote, she suddenly remembered that she was also a local candidate ("Oh, yes, and vote for me too!").

There were also fundraising events such as *lugaw* or dances for a cause. Some organizations and individuals also pledged support to the campaign. The support came in the form of money, services and promotion of Abanse! Pinay in their respective circles. Abanse! Pinay chapters were organized in several cities and provinces nationwide, and these operated mostly on a volunteer-basis.

Gender sensitivity was, of course, non-negotiable in the all-women party list organization. However this was sorely tested. Politics entails winning over potential allies and as Abanse! Pinay members realized, they cannot always come on too strongly about their feminism in this male-dominated arena. A member has this experience when she ran for councilor in their area:

- ▶ *My brother called his friends who were barangay captains because he was also a barangay captain. There were so many sexist jokes because many of them were men, and the jokes were really sexist! Then there were also these female captains*

68 The Party List law was passed in 1995; the 1998 national elections was the first time people voted for their party list representatives.

but... they were also like the men, like they have really imbibed the culture... I felt that there was a time that they were not like that but they learned it because they wanted to belong. I told them, Could we stop the green jokes? It was okay with them. But my brother told me later, "Ate Velo, don't be a purist. I know that it was not proper to tell such jokes but if you want to win them over".

Similar episodes were encountered by Abanse! Pinay members, particularly those who had first hand experience in running for local offices. Apart from this, they felt that as women candidates, their lives were under closer scrutiny than those of their male counterparts – from their family lives, to their educational attainment, to even how they dress.

In the case of Abanse! Pinay, running on the platform of women's human rights presented unique challenges exactly because their platform was on women's human rights. The question, "What about the men?" was a constant refrain in the political sorties and events they went to. Even colleagues from non-government organizations (NGOs) had asked them, "Why a women's party? Haven't women gotten what they want already?" To which, Abanse! Pinay members asked back, "Have we?"

There were also issues raised on the specific details of their platform and in more than one incident, their pro-women stance had taken a backlash.

▶ *There was one person in Cotabato who asked, was Abanse! Pinay in favor of divorce? Lorna Capunan, a lawyer, said, "Of course, we are in favor of divorce." Maribel [Ongpin] chided her, don't say that because in the provinces there are still many people who are very conservative. So we very discrete about our stand on reproductive health and rights after that.*

In another occasion:

▶ *Our slogan was, "Women's Health, Women's Rights, Women's Lives". We really built it on the women's health issues specifically reproductive health. The thing was, we were victimized by black propaganda. Word got around via txt that Abanse! Pinay... was pushing for legalizing abortion, and the church had sermons against us particularly in the Viasayas.*

Macho politics was only one dimension of the whole gamut of issues that Abanse! Pinay members dealt with when it first engaged in electoral politics. Essentially, the women were grappling with their idea and practice of power, and the seeming conflict between their activist stance and electoral politics.

▶ *Popularization work in NGOs is different, and it is also a different matter to translate this into votes. How do we do this, can we do it? we discovered that not because you have influence over the people as an NGO, you also have political influence. Karina David was the Secretary General (of Abanse! Pinay) during the first campaign... she said, "Can we tell this to the people, that we will help you, vote for us in the elections." Is that the right or necessary approach of NGOs who engage in electoral politics... how different are we then from the trapos? What is now our difference from them?*

As one of the formators described the experience of Abanse! Pinay, it has always been a struggle to maintain the group's idea, sanity and principles at the same time being politically pragmatic. The campaign period is only part of the story of any group that ran on the platform of transformative politics; winning a seat and being one of the 264 legislators in the House of Representatives is another, and more challenging part. For Patricia Mangrobang Sarenas, the Abanse! Pinay standard bearer in the 11th and 12th Congresses, it was clear that her work is to promote the interests of women in the legislative arena. She was aware that at the end of the day, the most immediate measure

of a legislator's effectiveness is the number of laws she has authored and passed for the group she represents.

This is not an easy feat, particularly for Party-List representatives who are marginalized, and has no political clout to speak of in Congress. Per formal rules and procedure they are on equal footing with district representatives; in practice, Abanse! Pinay had to join the House majority to gain leverage in their bid to head the Committee on Women. Even then, there was a practice that first-time representatives would not be given Committee leadership. They were eventually given the Committee, however the strings attached caused much discussion within Abanse! Pinay. Their alignment with the administration, in particular, was criticized by Party members

On the other hand, had they not joined the House majority, would they have gotten to head the Committee on Women which has a powerful role in the enactment of bills directly concerning women's rights and welfare? It was noted that not all Party-list representatives got the opportunity to head the House Committee directly relating to their sector. At worst, the Committee leadership would even be given to the very people who will protect the status quo. For instance, Sarenas cites the time when a banker chaired the Committee on Cooperatives Development when a Party-list representative from the National Confederation of Cooperatives (NATCCO) would have been otherwise the more logical person to lead.

There was also the challenge of promoting women's human rights and gender concerns within Congress itself. The Gender and Development budget which Abanse! Pinay members actively lobby in their respective local government units (LGUs), was also absent in the very space which had made it into law. Abanse! Pinay immediately set to work on this, and also spun off several other initiatives to mainstream gender within Congress. These included organizing gender sensitivity trainings, capacity building on the

use of gender-fair language in bills, meetings and caucuses with legislators, particularly the women legislators, on gender issues. In the course of their work on then still a proposed law for solo parents, Abanse! Pinay also mobilized and convened meetings with the House employees who were solo parents on their rights.

Part of Abanse! Pinay's core principles is that all issues are women's issues. Thus they were also involved in the discussions and lobbying on various sectoral concerns across the country, conscious to bring into the discussion the gender dimensions of these issues. At the same time, they also involved male legislators in gender issues, identifying potential allies among them, and encouraging them to be advocates for women's human rights.

To a degree, the gains of Abanse! Pinay in the above regard can be credited to the personality of its representative, Patricia Mangrobang Sarenas. Clearly, gender issues are not popular in Congress, and to convince the House to formally adopt a gender policy is a formidable challenge. In this sense, organizing and strengthening one's clout is imperative. Being a "batang Mindanaw" with Ilocano parents, marrying into a political family, and having worked for many years in local, regional and national-level coalitions, made it easier for Sarenas to find commonalities with other representatives. She also described herself as naturally friendly and got along well with everybody, even with the staff of the representatives. In politics, this characteristic is important primarily because politics is essentially a "numbers game". That is, it takes a majority vote to pass your bills, and it takes influence to be heard among the more than 200 legislators who are all promoting their interests.

In the long run, Abanse! Pinay members could say that they have accomplished much in terms of their legislative agenda because they were open to building working alliances with non-feminists and *trapo* politicians. However, there are still concerns over the extent they

are willing to negotiate and concede on their feminist principles. Nevertheless, Abanse! Pinay was also conscious to draw the line against cooptation.

▶ *That is the danger in the culture there, where the culture of patronage politics is still the norm... the dominant culture which can easily co-opt the language, the strategy used by the progressive women's movement. Because you are doing gender mainstreaming, you have to deal with other stakeholders in the universe of policy advocacy, the tendency is always the least common denominator.* ◀

One of the things that Abanse! Pinay did not compromise is their stand on corruption. Their Priority Development Assistance Funds, or the so-called "pork barrel" of legislators, were used mainly on the building of around 100 women's centers. Within the Party, the standard bearer/representative also submits expenditure reports of her allocated budget to the party officers.

Constituency building is also critical, particularly in politics where clouts and numbers matter. Part of Abanse! Pinay's goal as a party-list organization is to establish a women's vote. The women's vote however is not simply construed as women voting for women, but women *and men* pushing for the women's agenda and consciously integrating a gender perspective in all issues and arenas.

In this sense, members acknowledge that fielding women as candidates and administrators in strategic positions in local and national government agencies is only one strategy to build a critical number for the women's agenda lobby. Alongside of these should be the continuing advocacy and organizing work in mainstream and alternative areas where there are Abanse! Pinay members: in social welfare, education, law and media, to name a few. In the immediate term, organizing is critical to strengthen the political base of a party-list organization such as Abanse! Pinay. In the long term, members recognize that with or without their party-

list representative in Congress, it is integral in their vision as feminists that avenues should be opened up to empower women, particularly politics and public decision-making.

However, and particularly because Abanse! Pinay is a party-list organization, it draws its legitimacy as a member of the legislation mainly from the group it claims to represent: the women. And unlike district representatives, their constituents are not bound by geographic localities, but are found across the country and constitute half of its population. Therein lay at least two crucial challenges to Abanse! Pinay as a women's party-list: First, how to draw in and mobilize women to participate in promoting their gender-specific interests in Congress. Second, how to unify the diverse and multiple identities, affiliations and stances of women on various issues, and codify this into national law.

Of the two, it is the first one which is more familiar to Abanse! Pinay. Gender sensitivity trainings, developing women leaders, conscientization and organizing of women around their practical and strategic needs are already being done by party members prior to their engaging national electoral politics. With the second concern of unifying women, none of the Abanse! Pinay members subscribe to the idea of women as a monolithic category. However, this became a practical difficulty in lobbying for a law that will protect women from the most common form of abuse they experience. One group called it domestic violence (DV), another called it abuse of women in intimate relationships (AWIR). And both lobbied hard to have their versions of the law passed.

The difference had been more than just the title of the bills. The most heated debates raged around the issue of the proposed laws coverage. The Anti-DV lobbyists made the household the point of reference. Women abused by their housemates, regardless of their relationship with the abuser, would be

covered by the law. Children should also be protected from such abuse. On the other hand, the Anti-AWIR group qualified that it is the nature of the relationship of the women to the abuser which is the critical factor. Being in an intimate relationship with their abuser makes the woman specially vulnerable to violence. They further contended that abuse of children is already covered by another law and there was no need to insert provisions for them in the proposed law.

The situation did not spoke well of the advocacy to promote women's human's rights, and was used as case by many to macho legislators to dismiss the abuse of women as an issue. Not a few times were there remarks such as, "How can we address this issue if the women themselves do not even agree on it?" or "There bicker the women again." On the part of Abanse! Pinay which supported the Anti-DV bill, they were thrown aback that some women's formations which they have worked with on several occasions did not even speak with them of their move to file a new bill. The Anti-AWIR group got another woman legislator who was powerful in the Committee on Women to sponsor their bill. Recalled one Abanse! Pinay member:

For Abanse! Pinay the points raised by the Anti-AWIR group were also considered in the Anti-DV bill. Although the bill makes as reference the household, it was clear that the men will be not be covered by the law. With regard to the inclusion of children, this was a strategy for the bill to be more acceptable to male legislators who while not recognizing the existence of gender-based violence, would sympathize with a woman and her children's abuse.

The law was passed in 2004 as the Anti-Violence against Women and their Children Act (Republic Act 9262). In the final version, many of the provisions of both the Anti-DV and Anti-AWIR bills were integrated. Yet it taught a "painful" lesson in politics to Abanse! Pinay:

► *In the case of domestic violence versus AWIR controversy, ano ba ang primary value natin? Halimbawa, will you be a purist na let's say, ito ang aking feminist principles, I'll stick to this... we come from a feminist background, ano na, we always go straight in our feminist principles or we can surrender from time to time the better to promote our legislative agenda because when you are in Congress, the first thing is to pass laws... not just to make privileged speeches but to act.* ◀

Clearly for Abanse! Pinay, there were gains and losses in engaging the State through electoral politics and within the national legislature. Between the gains and losses are the challenges, the biggest of which is how, without being blind to the differences and dissidence among women, strengthen the unities within the women's movement and transform them into a political force.

Abanse! Pinay won a seat in the 11th and 12th Congress, and lost in its bid in the 13th and the 14th Congress. The reason was the increased minimum votes that party-lists groups must be able to mobilize in order to be elected. There was also a question over the accreditation of some party-list groups which do not represent marginalized sectors, for instance, professional and business groups. A month before the 2007 elections (for the 14th Congress), the party-list Akbayan also exposed to the media a list of "admin fronts" i.e. government-supported groups running for House seats, thus not qualified as party-list.

The two consecutive losses of Abanse! Pinay disqualifies them to run for a fifth time. This is in accordance to Republic Act 7941, or the Party List law, which states

Sec. 6. Removal and/or Cancellation of Registration. – The COMELEC may *motu proprio* or upon verified complaint of any interested party, remove or cancel, after due notice and hearing, the registration of any national, regional or sectoral party,

organization or coalition on any of the following grounds:

- (1) It fails to participate in the last two (2) preceding elections or fails to obtain at least two percent (2%) of the votes cast under the party-list system in the two (2) preceding elections for the constituency in which it has registered.

This is a setback for Abanse! Pinay, however, it is only with regard to their work within legislature. Legislative advocacy, building women's capacities for leadership roles and strengthening networks continue as these are already integrated in the women's empowerment strategies of Abanse! Pinay members, even before their Party-list was born. Looking back on their experiences while in Congress, some members opined that it may be more strategic to position women leaders at local elective posts. At the local level there would be more space for more immediate and direct intervention on women's marginalized situations.

24 Establishing a Gender Quota: *The Akbayan's Women's Committee Case Study 2*

The gender quota is an affirmative action that aims to encourage women's participation in leadership positions by reserving a percentage of seats for women to fill in. In the parlance of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the gender quota is a "temporary special measure" which a State is obligated to undertake, and should be discontinued when it has achieved its goal of de facto equality of women with men in the arena of public decision-making.

In the Philippines, it is the party-list organization Akbayan which authored and leads in the lobbying efforts to pass a bill that calls for the allocation of 30% of leadership positions for women. This includes positions in all elective and appointive positions in the government, government owned and controlled corporations, the military, police and even political parties. Specifically House Bill 5496, or the Gender Balance Bill,⁶⁹ aims targets:

1. To promote the women's active participation in the electoral process;
2. To ensure women's access to political representation and decision-making; and,
3. To institutionalize reforms in the recruitment, selection, and appointment of women in all levels of the government bureaucracy.⁷⁰

The ultimate aim of the Gender Balance Bill is to have equal or 50-50 representation of women and men in public offices.

69 The full title of HB 5496 is "An act strengthening women's participation and representation in elective and appointive positions in the government, including government-owned and controlled corporations, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police and other law enforcement agencies, and for other purposes (Gender Balance Act of 2006)". Full text of the Bill is available at <http://www.pcij.org/blog/wp-docs/HB5496GenderBalanceBill.pdf>; accessed 05 May 2007

70 Section 3, HB 5496

Accordingly, it raises to 40% the gender quota in appointive positions in the government by 2010, and by 2013, it projects that the 50-50 representation in these bodies shall have been achieved.⁷¹

If passed, this is a landmark legislation promoting women's human rights in the country.

Although it is not a woman-specific organization or party, it is not surprising that Akbayan would sponsor such bill. Akbayan has been known in the political arena as a progressive party-list organization formed by key blocs and individuals in the social movements. The impetus for Akbayan has been two-fold: on the level of strategy and organization.⁷² First, there was recognition on the critical importance of engaging the State from within, while continuing to mobilize pressure groups from the mass base of social movement. Second, and with regard to organizational concerns, it was also recognized by these progressive blocs that a machinery, distinct and separate from their mother organizations and coalitions, would have to be created to focus on the electoral and parliamentary arenas of intervention. Women leaders and feminists in particular have been part of the Akbayan even in its formative years, thus shaping the political party agenda.

Akbayan was formally launched in 1998; in May of the same year it participated in the national and local elections. Since then, it has consistently promoted the human rights of marginalized groups such as peasants, indigenous peoples, rural and urban poor, LGBTs, children and women – and in all cases, ensured that a gender perspective is integrated in its platform issues. Apart from

71 Section 4, HB 5496

72 Abao 1997(275–276)

the Gender Balance Bill, Akbayan has also sponsored and co-authored bills addressing reproductive health, discrimination against LGBTs and prostitution, and the Magna Carta for Women.

Yet while the organization lobbies within Congress to pass women-friendly policies, women in Akbayan also lobbies within the party to promote gender equality. The Akbayan's Women Committee was formed early on by the party to ensure that the women's agenda is represented. Soon enough, the Women's Committee found themselves locked in a power struggle to address the gender-based discrimination in a supposedly progressive political formation. A case to point was the sexual harassment of women members and heckling using sexist language was not unusual during the Akbayan pre-Congress, albeit quickly defended by male members as simply *lambing* or *biro*.⁷³

Lambing or not, this has become a tension point among the women and men of Akbayan. For the feminists in Akbayan, tolerance of such harassment, whether deliberately done or not, will deter women participation in the party beyond gender-stereotyped or male-defined roles.

The debate on gender-based discrimination was further heightened when the feminists in Akbayan forwarded a gender quota as a matter of party policy. In their proposal, 30% of leadership positions in all levels (from national to local) would be reserved for women members. Akbayan women leaders present in the said pre-Congress recalled during the conversations:

▶ A: [O]n the floor the [women] seemed bitchy because only 30 percent and you can't even give that to us, and that's only a token number. I remember I was the one facilitating the session and there was a strict instruction to me to not divide the

house. Because if the house gets divided, we lose.

Q: Why would you lose?

A: Because there was really strong resistance from the men

A: At that time there were more groups of men. It was really more because there were more men than women not being united ◀

The Visayan bloc in the Akbayan pre-Congress in particular stated that party leadership should be based on merits not gender. One sarcastic individual even stood up and said in the plenary, "*Gusto nyo sa inyo na lang lahat!*" [If you want, you can have it all!]. On the side were also comments like, "*Ayan na naman ang mga kababaihan*" [There goes the women again].

The debate went on for four hours. Feminists were resolute and stated that 30 percent was in fact a concession for women who form majority of the party electorates. Supporters of the gender quota also cited that such system has worked favorably in other socialist parties, and that the gender quota is in fact a concrete translation of Akbayan's recognition of women's important role in party building.

Still others were concerned about the operationalization of the gender quota: 30 percent of what? nominated leaders or candidates? it is already difficult to form local chapter, what more if we put a gender quota? Also, are there enough women to fill in the reserved 30 percent leadership seats for them? The organizers in particular were complaining more because they know it will be their responsibility to meet the 30 percent gender quota.

By the end of the session, the members came to a compromise that the pre-Congress body will adopt the gender quota, but it will be subject for review if women in the main Congress did not meet the quota. Eventually, the gender quota was adopted by the General Assembly to become part of Akbayan's policies.

73 Abao 1997 (282)

Looking back at the first pre-Congress, the Akbayan Women's Committee admitted that the resistance to the gender quota also stems from the fact that they did not prepare or "groundwork" the political blocs enough on the concept. However, they also recognized that the more critical aspect of gender sensitivity within political blocs and formations that are not specifically women-centered or feminist was the main barrier to the members' appreciation of the gender quota system. And it is still on this aspect of gender sensitivity, more than a decade after the first pre-Congress, that the Akbayan Women's Committee has to make a significant dent. Some of the Committee's observations on this regard are the following:

- > Members have yet to internalize the value and vision that necessitated the institutionalization of a gender quota within the party. It is often the case that women are fielded as official delegates to party Congresses as a matter of the chapter's compliance to a policy, rather than stemming from the belief that women's representation in the party is important.
- > Second, the gender quota is essentially one of the ways by which to encourage women to become active in the public domain as leaders. However, this strategy is watered down by the persistent gender stereotyping of women. Women leaders are often found along traditional lines of "women's work" i.e. secretariat and financial management. As one Women's Committee member joked, secretariat work is oftentimes burdensome for women, while the role of the treasurer does not mean very much when the chapter has no funds.
- > Third, and an echo from the first pre-Congress, is the question: are there enough women to fill in the 30 percent reserved seats for them? While it is true that women form half of the membership in Akbayan – and perhaps even more in some local chapters – the key concern

here is their *qualification* and *willingness* to become leaders. Put this way, even women members themselves may agree that there are not enough women to fill the reserved slots.

Yet this also highlights a crucial gap in the appreciation of the gender quota system. As a measure to address gender inequality in decision-making venues, it should not be taken in isolation of other ways to support women's empowerment. By itself, the gender quota has little value to women. For one Women's Committee member, who also sits at the Akbayan Executive Committee, the gender quota policy is readily appreciated in large party gatherings like pre-Congresses and Congresses because it contributes to the visibility of women. But in the everyday grind of women balancing roles of motherhood and community leadership, the policy has minimal significance without practical assistance:

- ▶ *I am telling them that can't we not not have meetings at seven in the evening because we also have women members who have children to take care of. What I want more to do is to give washing machines to Akbayan women members so they can attend meetings and lead the group.* ◀

Creating enabling environments for women's political participation also calls for their economic empowerment. Increased incomes, better livelihood opportunities and access to basic goods and services are some of the practical issues Akbayan political organizers have strategized around to encourage women to be more involved in community decision-making. As one Akbayan organizer bluntly put it: For what are you working o doing political work? Have livelihood programs so you can support your activist work.

Women's hesitation to become public leaders may also be rooted in the demands of the work. Being a woman leader in a Akbayan entails commitment to a schedule and list of tasks that often requires a woman to strike a compromise, if not outright choose, between her responsibilities to her family and the party.

▶ Doris was a councilor at the same time an Akbayan leader. She had a very tight schedule... we would be in the national council meeting then later fly to Bohol and we would do this in a span of four days. What she does literally is to pass by her house, put down her bag and talk for a while to her children. She would be flying out in a few hours again but she would talk to her children first. I asked her how she balances all of her responsibilities. She answered that it was a good thing that her husband understands her life and that she really loves what she is doing. ◀

While not typical, the snapshot of a woman activist's life above illustrates the balancing act women active in politics (in this case, within the party and as an elected government official). Another Akabayan woman leader shared that she had to give up her child-bearing years to focus on the movement, a sacrifice that not many women would do:

▶ If there was something I gave up for the movement, it was my child-bearing years. Although I don't really regret it, a part of me thinks I made a mistake. But there is also a part of me that knows that at that time it seemed like a good decision. I really have no time to make a baby. I think I know that I cannot take care of the baby anyway. At least I know I am feminist in that sense that I asserted that I do not want to be pregnant. However I think I've gone too far because I am already 40. I'm also a control freak in that way because if you look at my datebook, you'd say, "Ay! You only have to implement you life." ◀

Feminism or "feminist" has become a key word in describing the politics of the Akbayan Women's Committee, even as some Akbayan women hesitate to use the term to describe their work or themselves. Ironically, Akbayan as a political party officially claims to be a "feminist" organization. The narrative on

the Akbayan website about their "brand" of socialist feminism bears quoting:⁷⁴

▶ Akbayan is a feminist party. It recognizes that gender inequity permeates in all structures of society. The intersection of male dominance or patriarchy with capitalism, semi-feudalism, ethnic and racial hierarchies, historically creates the complexion of women's oppression. Thus, Akbayan works to address the unequal power relations between men and women in both the public/productive and private/reproductive spheres of life as it works towards democratic, egalitarian and humanist socialism. Akbayan seeks to empower women and contributes to the struggle of the women's movement in eliminating all forms of violence against women.

Akbayan seeks to eliminate homophobia as a patriarchal tool to keep both women and men in tight boxes of stereotypical behavior and roles. A human rights violation, homophobia manifests as any act, remark, treatment or attitude that discriminates or abuse another person on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. ◀

This is the "public" stance of Akbayan with regard to its advocacy on women's human rights and gender equality. However, another story unfolds within the party. The issues raised by the Women's Committee's in their Open Letter to the Third Regular National Akbayan Congress,⁷⁵ is particularly insightful:

74 <http://akbayan.org/>; accessed 07 May 2007

75 The 3rd Akbayan Congress was held on 14–15 October 2006. The Women's Committee Open Letter was also titled, "The Akbayan Women's (Unofficial) Report." As footnote to the document, the Women's Committee stated that: "Unlike other Congress documents, this document has not been developed to seek official Congress approval. We have produced other resolutions for that purpose. As mentioned earlier this paper is meant to inform the body about our reflections. We do not even claim this to be an "official" report – it is a "report" nevertheless, from us (who gathered for a Pre-Congress). Moreover, we do not claim to represent the views of all Akbayan women.

On the gender quota

We know this situation [the seeming inability to fill the 30 percent reserved slots for women] is not necessarily about the lack of “able” women, rather the conditions are such that women have more disincentives than incentives to lead or manage the organization. *Ang mga babaeng lider ng Akbayan ay pagod, tumatanda, kakaunti.* [The women leaders of Akbayan are tired, getting on their years, and few] The lament of a significant number of Akbayan women is not new: *nag-aalaga kami ng anak, nag-aalaga kami ng baboy o taniman, at binubugbog pa kami ng aming mga asawa.* [we take care of our children, we take care of our pigs and gardens, and we are even battered by our husbands].

On the gender dynamics within the party

We know that men are not the “class enemy” so to speak. But why do we feel that very few men within Akbayan actually know how to relate to us women *as equals*. *Either nilalandi kami o ginagawa kaming secretary/assistant* [italics in the original]. We often laugh at ourselves over this – that some of us have experienced even worse: Akbayan men sometimes just forget that we exist at all. We laugh but we know that this is not funny.

On the practice of feminist ethics by Akbayan members

We also know that some of the Akbayan men still go to those “girlie” bars and still look at women as sources of entertainment. Moreover not a few of us have received sexist jokes – usually through text messages – that make fun of us women.

On the translation of feminist principles in advocacy

Furthermore, there is the reality that the rest of our Akbayan bills and advocacies are gender blind. This means that, to a large measure, women’s concerns have been “ghettoed”: concerns that are not explicitly about women’s rights are not considered to have a women’s “angle”. If feminism has a view on practically everything, Akbayan then is definitely not feminist because we do not use gender lenses in analyzing problems or determining political strategies and actions.

It is clear that the main arguments against labeling Akbayan as a feminist political party comes from the observed incongruence between the ideology and practice, with the practice of feminism is as the more important criteria in claiming feminism than the knowledge of and self-identification with the ideology.

Related to this, not a few women members themselves are reluctant to call themselves as feminist. A great majority cited the lack of confidence to articulate feminism as an ideology as reason for this reluctance. Some also cited negative experiences with self-identified feminists as cause to disavow feminism. Still, for others, feminism is just another term and does not matter at community level work. The Women’s Committee themselves admitted that they and their advocacy have been more visible at national Party conferences than at the ground.

Whichever it is, the Women’s Committee sees the need to define “feminism”, or more specifically, feminism in the context of Akbayan. For the “here and now” the Committee forwarded a working definition of “feminism” in their Open Letter:

- (1) the struggle for women’s rights (i.e. including and most especially the struggle “of” women “for” women’s rights
- (2) sensitivity and responsiveness to the concerns of women

- (3) equality between men and women, and
- (4) the empowerment and “wellness” of women

However, the Women’s Committee admitted that this definition still needs to be validated, particularly by the women members, mainstreamed and translated to concrete programs and actions of Akbayan.

Despite these odds, Akbayan women continue to push for reforms within their political party, and hopefully, the gains will be magnified in society through Akbayan’s public advocacy. The 2006 Akbayan Congress in particular saw the women more assertive in pushing for gender-responsive provisions in the revised Constitution and By-Laws. Some significant provisions inserted in the new version were:

- > the explicit statement of “socialist feminism” as a core principle of the party (Article I, Section 3 (e))

Socialist Feminist:

Wich sees class and patriarchy as the root causes of gender inequality; opposes class exploitation and gender oppression; asserts that the personal is political and that women’s rights are human rights; values reproductive and productive work of women; works towards the elimination of the sexual division of labor; moves for the transformation of perspectives on gender relations, sexuality, reproduction, and the family; and promotes women’s empowerment as a strategy towards class and gender equality and equity

- > Mandatory allocation of at least 20% of membership dues to direct services for survivors of violence against women (VAW) (Article IV, Section 2 (d))
- > Included in the fundamental duties of Party units at all levels is ensuring that their programs are gender-sensitive and gender-responsive (Article V, Section 7 (a)); and

focal persons for women’s concerns may created for each unit (Section 8)

- > Inclusion of VAW as a ground for disciplinary action, whether the aggrieved is a member of Akbayan or not (Article XI, Section 2 (f))

But again, the above are policies; what had been lacking in the past is the translation into concrete actions. Even more alarming to the Akabayan feminists is the extent of the “gender insensitivity” within their Party. The Party’s touted feminism was sorely tested in 2006 by two events: a rape case wherein the victim and the accused were both Party members, and which resulted to the expulsion of the latter; and the Third Akbayan Congress where the Women’s Committee was frowned upon for asserting the 30% gender quota rule on women’s representation in Party decision-making bodies, including the Party-list nominees.

The second event was even more significant in the light of the gender quota as one of the policies established early on in the Party. The tensions during the Akbayan Congress and frustration of the women can be gleaned in their letter to the National Council:

- ▶ *While our intention in raising the protest was to argue for the application of the policy to the election of party list nominees, we certainly did not plan to ruin everyone’s night nor disrupt party unity. Ours was just an exercise of our rights as duly designated delegates from the Women’s Committee, an exercise we deem important in our struggle for empowerment both within the Party and the society at large. While we did not anticipate the level of adverse reactions we received from our men and women comrades, we firmly stand by our positions and arguments.*

To the charge that they are simply *diskuntento* (not contented) and spoilers to the Party socials that would come after the session, they argued further:

► *It was the best time to put the protest on the table. We wonder when would be the other "right" time for such protest. We recognize that all of us were tired after "the second 14 hour day", but comments like "the band was waiting and the beer getting warm" is a subtle reflection of the embedded male-ness or machismo in the party. We too were tired and want to party and socialize, but they just have to wait for we want the body to recognize that the 30% quota for women was not met as stipulated in our constitution. Ours is just an assertion of our thoughts and rights at that time, which should not be misconstrued with us being aggressive or irrational.* ◀

This frustration within the Party is tempered by the inroads have forged at the societal level which cannot be denied. It is to Akbayan's credit that more and more grassroots women are enabled to participate in public political actions as carrying their sectoral platforms, if not yet their gendered identity. In the conversations among Aurora and Zamboanga Akbayan women, consistent are their statements "*Tumapang kami*" [We became courageous] and "*Nagkaroon kami ng pakialam sa mga issues*" [We became involved in issues], referring to the values they have imbibed since they became party members. Another significant contribution of Akbayan to empower women at the grassroots level is the advocacy for gender and development (GAD) mainstreaming in the local government units. In particular, the lobby for the implementation of the GAD budget has become one of the key issues where community women have been mobilized to address their practical and strategic needs.

There is hope, and the Akbayan Women's Committee sees that they cannot give up just because the road to gender equality within the party is long and difficult. The struggle within the party is part of the bigger landscape of working for the transformation of society. This is how one woman leader

explained her choice to be involved in Akbayan rather than in an all-women's party:

► *One of my insights about that is being in a mixed organization is necessary because in our advocacy, it's not only the women that you need to convince. At least in a mixed organization, you would have the benefit of discussion among men and women members, and you would have been gauged more or less the levels of consciousness and awareness and perception of men. So when you go out, and you know that you have male advocates with you who are also knowledgeable of the issue, in a way you feel more confident because you also know the perspective of men. Second is the sharpening. As a woman you are more challenged to sharpen the women's agenda and convincing powers so that you can fight for and pass the issues and concerns you are advocating.* ◀

If the Akbayan women can achieve gender equality within their party, then a significant part of the struggle in society on the same platform is won.

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Akbayan! <http://akbayan.org>

Center for Asia Pacific Women in Politics (CAPWIP),
<http://www.capwip.org/resources/resources.html>

House of Representatives, <http://www.congress.gov.ph>

National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women,
www.ncrfw.gov.ph

National Statistical Coordination Board, <http://www.nscb.gov.ph/activestats/gender/publicad/publicad.asp>

Senate of the Philippines, <http://www.senate.gov.ph>

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Interviews

Romeo C. Dongeto. Executive Director. Philippine Legislators' Committee on Population and Development Foundation, Inc. 19 September 2006. Interview by Nancy Endrinal Parreño

Karen Tañada. Executive Director. GZO Peace Institute. 15 November 2006. Interview by Nancy

Endrinal Parreño
Meeting minutes of Abanse! Pinay

Interviews and FGD with Abanse! Pinay leaders

26 Annex 1: List of Research Participants/Resource Persons

Abanse! Pinay

1. Amitan, Nita
2. Caharian, Berondo
3. Fernandez, Teresa B.
4. Flor, Celia
5. Nayra, Pauline
6. Rikken, Remedios
7. Sarenas, Patricia M.
8. Sarmiento, La Rainne (former councilor of Manila and Head, SIKAP Buhay, Quezon City)
9. Tañada, Karen
10. Yang, Elizabeth
11. Salcedo, Luchie

Akbayan Citizen's Action Party List

12. Abao, Carmel (National)
13. Amatorio, Vita (Aurora Province)
14. Balagot, Elsa (Zamboanga)
15. Baluyot, Marife (Zamboanga)
16. Hontiveros-Baraquel, Ana Theresia "Risa" (House of Representatives)
17. Frias, Geh (National)
18. Jopson, Fely
19. Katoh, Angie (Zamboanga)
20. Perpetua, Ma. Angela (National)
21. Pilo, Mylene S.
22. Restauero, Ruth (Cebu)
23. Rosales, Loretta Ann P. (House of Representatives)
24. Licad, Irene (Aurora Province)
25. Morada, Francisca (Aurora Province)
26. Melgar, Kit (National)
27. Tatud, Juanita (HUKUSAKA-Tumaga, Zamboanga)
28. Tipsay, Abita (HUKUSAKA-Tumaga, Zamboanga)

Gabriela Women's Party List/ Gabriela

29. Canson, Lyda (Bathaluman Crisis Center, Davao)
30. Cariño, Jill (Cordillera Women's Education Action Research Center or CWERC. Baguio City)
31. Lubi, Susan (National)
32. Masa, Liza (House of Representatives)
33. Padilla, Cherry
34. Palabay, Cristina
35. Palaganas, Julie (Innabuyog-Gabriela Baguio)

Laban ng Masa

36. Agravante, Tessa (Institute for Popular Democracy)
37. Fabros, Merceditas (WomanHealth-Philippines; Freedom from Debt Coalition)
38. Garces, Teody (Kasama-Pilipina)
39. Marcelino, Aleli (SARILAYA)
40. Encio, Elma (SARILAYA)
41. Martinez, Susan (SARILAYA)
42. Nemenzo, Ana Maria R. (WomanHealth-Philippines; Freedom from Debt Coalition)

Gender Resource Network (GRN)/ GAD mainstreaming practitioners

43. Bucoy, Rhodora (SIDLAK-Gender Resource Center, Cebu City)
44. Castro-Palaganas, Erlinda (Baguio City)
45. de Dios-Javate, Aurora (former Chairperson of the Board of Commissioner, NCRFW; Women and Gender Institute-Miriam College)
46. Hortelano, Pauline S., (NCRFW; WEDPRO Board of Directors)

47. Marcelo, Alexandrina (Reproductive Resource and Research Group; WEDPRO Board of Directors)
48. Pagsuberon, Myrna T., (WINGS, Bohol)
49. Rodriguez, Luz (UNIFEM-CEDAW SEAP Network)
50. Sanchez, Rosena (Mindanao Working Group on Reproductive Health, Gender and Sexuality)
51. Sumaray, Rhodora May (UNV-NSCB and GTZ; WEDPRO Board of Directors)
52. Torres-Cortes, Damcelle (former NCRFW Commissioner, youth sector; WEDPRO Board of Directors)
66. Lao, Yasmine
67. Lodovice, Evelyn (Pasonangka, Zamboanga)
68. Miciano, Amparo (Pambansang Kongreso ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan or PKKK)
69. Madalang, Lyn (EBGAN, Baguio City)
70. Maglangit, Tarhata, (Executive Director, BWSF, Inc. Cotabato City)
71. Mampen, Melanie (Regional Planning & Development Office, Cotabato City)
72. Mendoza, Froilyn (Executive Director, Teduray Lambangian Women's Org. Inc. Cotabato City)

Individuals/Other Organizations

53. Alzate, Betzaida B. (Vice Mayor, Bangued, Abra)
54. Albano, Jennifer
55. Bulawan, Alma G. (President, BUKLOD Center, Olongapo City)
56. Cabato, Julie (Baguio City)
57. Diocolano, Giobay (Executive Director Kadtabagan Foundation for Peace and Development Inc. Cotabato City)
58. Doguilem, Gloria S. (Concern Citizens of Abra and Good Governance)
59. Domingo, Trinidad (Rural Congress of Women)
60. Etrate, Lolita B. (Kagawad, Abra)
61. Gattud, Wilma S. (Municipal Mayor, Tubo, Abra)
62. Gomez, Maita (founding member, KAIBA)
63. Gutok, Samira
64. Jajuri, Atty. Raissa (SALIGAN-Mindanao)
65. Karom, Bainon (President, Federation of United Mindanawan Bangsamoro Women Multi-Purpose Coop; former ARMM DSWD Secretary; former head of the Women's Committee in the MNLF Central Committee, Cotabato City)
73. Pasandalan, Norma (President, Alliance of Concerned Bangsamoro Women and Development; Director, DENR-ARMM; Board Member of Bangsamoro Women solidarity Forum Inc., Cotabato City)
74. Perez, Gina (Councilor, City of Olongapo)
75. Sumangil, Pura (Concern Citizen of Abra and Good Governance)
76. Tabanda, Betty Lourdes (former councilor, Baguio City)
77. Tagle, Susan (former campaign manager, Kilusan ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino or KNP)
78. Tauli Victoria (Tebtebba Indigenous People International for Policy Research & Education, Baguio City)
79. Valera, Elizabeth I. (Director for Research Divine Word College, Bangued, Abra)
80. Yap, Ma. Violeta Jennylyn (DSWD, ARMM-Cotabato City)

27 Annex 2: List of Philippine Laws in Support of Women's and Their Children's Welfare and Rights

1988

RA 6655 (April 26, 1988)

An Act Establishing and Providing for a Free Public Secondary Education and for Other Purposes

RA 6657 (June 10, 1988)

An Act Instituting a Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program to Promote Social Justice and Industrialization, Providing the Mechanisms for its Implementation and for Other Purposes

1989

RA 6725 (April 27, 1989)

An Act Strengthening the Prohibition on Discrimination Against Women with Respect to Terms and Conditions of Employment, Amending for the Purpose Article One Hundred Thirty-Five of the Labor Code, As Amended

RA 6728 (June 10, 1989)

An Act Providing Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education and Appropriating Funds Therefor

RA 6809 (December 13, 1989)

An Act Lowering the Age of Majority From Twenty-One to Eighteen Years, Amending for the Purpose EO No. 209, and for Other Purposes

1990

RA 6938 (March 10, 1990)

An Act to Ordain a Cooperative Code of the Philippines

RA 6949 (April 10, 1990)

An Act to Declare March Eight of Every Year as a Working Special Holiday to be Known as National Women's Day

RA 6955 (June 13, 1990)

An Act to Declare Unlawful the Practice of Matching for Marriage to Foreign Nationals on a Mail-Order Basis and For Other Similar Practices. Including the Advertisement, Publication, Printing or Distribution of Brochures, Fliers and Other Propaganda Materials in Furtherance Thereof and Providing Penalty Therefor

RA 6955 (June 13, 1990)

The Consumer Act of the Philippines

RA 6972 (November 23, 1990)

An Act Establishing a Day Care Center in Every Barangay Instituting Therein a Total Development and Protection of Children Program, Appropriating Funds Therefor, and for Other Purposes

1991

RA 7192 (December 11, 1991)

An Act Promoting the Integration of Women as Full and Equal Partners of Men in Development and Nation Building and for Other Purposes

1992

RA 7305 (March 26, 1992)

The Magna Carta of Public Health Workers

RA 7309 (March 30, 1992)

An Act Creating a Board of Claims Under the Department of Justice for Victims of Unjust Imprisonment or Detention and Victims of Violent Crimes and for Other Purposes

RA 7322 (March 30, 1992)

An Act Increasing Maternity Benefits in Favor of Women Workers in the Private Sector, Amending for the Purpose Section 14-A of Republic Act No. 1161, as Amended and for Other Purposes

RA 7432 (April 23, 1992)

An Act to Maximize the Contribution of Senior Citizens to Nation Building, Grant Benefits and Special Privileges and for Other Purposes

RA 7610 (June 17, 1992)

An Act Providing for Stronger Deterrence and Special Protection Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination, Providing Penalties for its Violation, and for Other Purposes

RA 7600 (June 17, 1992)

An Act Requiring All Government and Private Health Institutions with Obstetrical Services to Adopt Rooming-in and Breastfeeding Practices and for Other Purposes

1993

RA 7655 (August 19, 1993)

An Act Increasing the Minimum Wage of Househelpers Amending for the Purpose Article 143 of Presidential Decree No. 142, as Amended

RA 7659 (December 13, 1993)

An Act to Impose the Death Penalty on Certain Heinous Crimes, Amending for the Purpose the Revised Penal Code, as Amended, Other Special Penal Laws, and for Other Purposes

1994

RA 7688 (March 3, 1994)

An Act Giving Representation to Women in Social Security Commission Amending for the Purpose Section 3(A) of Republic Act 1161, as Amended

1995

RA 7877 (February 14, 1995)

Anti-Sexual Harassment Law of 1995

An Act Declaring Sexual Harassment Unlawful in the Employment, Education Or Training Environment, and For Other Purposes

RA 8042 (February 20, 1995)

Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 An Act to Institute the Policies of Overseas Employment and Establish a Higher Standard of Protection and Promotion of the Welfare of the Migrant Workers, Their Families and Overseas Filipinos in Distress, and for Other Purposes

Omnibus Rules and Regulations Implementing The Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995

RA 7822 (February 20, 1995)

An Act Providing Assistance to Women Engaging in Micro and Cottage Business Enterprises, and for Other Purposes

RA 7822 (February 20, 1995)

An Act Providing Assistance to Women Engaging in Micro and Cottage Business Enterprises, and for Other Purposes

RA 7491 (March 3, 1995)

An Act Providing for the Election of Party-List Representatives Through the Party-list system, and Appropriating Funds Therefor

RA 8171 (October 23, 1995)

An Act Providing for the Repatriation of Filipino Women Who Have Lost Their Philippine Citizenship by Marriage to Aliens and of Natural Born Filipinos

1996

RA 8187 (June 11, 1996)

An Act Granting Paternity Leave of Seven (7) Days with Full Pay to all Married Male Employees in the Private and Public Sectors for the First Four (4) Deliveries of

the Legitimate Spouse with Whom he is Cohabiting and for Other Purposes

An Act Defining Violence Against Women and Their Children, Providing for Protective Measures for Victims, Prescribing Penalties Therefore, and For Other Purposes

1997

RA 8353 (September 30, 1997)

Anti-Rape Act of 1997

An Act Expanding the Definition of the Crime of Rape, Reclassifying the Same as a Crime Against Persons, Amending for the Purpose Act No. 3815, as Amended, Otherwise Known as the Revised Penal Code, and for Other Purposes

RA 8369 (October 28, 1997)

An Act Establishing Family Courts, granting Them Exclusive Original Jurisdiction Over Child and Family Cases, Amending Batas Pambansa No. 192, as Amended, Otherwise Known as the Judiciary Reorganization Act of 1980, Appropriating Funds Therefor and for Other Purposes

1998

RA 8552 (February 25, 1998)

An Act Establishing the Rules and Policies on the Domestic Adoption of Filipino Children and For Other Purposes

2003

RA 9208 (March 8, 2003?)

Anti-Trafficking Act of 2003

An Act to Institute Policies to Eliminate Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Establishing the Necessary Mechanisms for the Protection and Support of Trafficked Persons, Providing Penalties for its Violations, and For Other Purposes

2004

RA 9262 (March 8, 2004)

Anti-VAW/C Law of 2004

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