

## ENGENDERING LOCAL GOVERNANCE\*

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper defines women's political empowerment borrowing from the UNDP's development framework using the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) "which examines whether women and men are able to actively participate in economic and political life and take part in decision making" (UNDP 1995:73). Furthermore, in modifying GEM this paper focuses only on women in local governance, since it is an area where efforts in political empowerment is easier studied using micro lenses. The modified GEM focuses on three main concerns: election of women local chief executives, local chief executives' advocacy of women-oriented programs and women's advocacy at the grassroots level.*

*The paper also shows that gender alone is not the way to engendered governance. Female and male local officials must all be aware of the need to redress inequalities among the genders through policy and action.*

### Introduction

The Philippines has a unique political experience in that the country has had two women presidents who came to power only some years apart. These two women presidents actually have more commonalities than gender. First, their elevation to the highest office came about after a people power revolution which

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deposed two male presidents perceived to be corrupt. Second, they have close kinship to prominent politicians. Corazon C. Aquino (Cory) is the wife of martyred Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr., while Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (GMA) is the daughter of former President Diosdado Macapagal.

While Cory and GMA may be examples of empowered Filipino women, we must take caution in concluding that Filipino women are empowered because two of them have become presidents. To say that Filipino women are really politically potent, we must look at the range of political mechanisms by which women may be empowered: (1) through the electoral process as voters and candidates, and (2) civil society where women participate as program advocates. However, political potency likewise denotes the ability to make decisions which deal with policy formulation and program implementation.

This paper defines women's political empowerment borrowing from the UNDP's development framework utilizing the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) "which examines whether women and men are able to actively participate in economic and political life and take part in decision-making" (UNDP 1995:73). Furthermore, in modifying GEM this paper focuses only on women in local governance, since it is an area where efforts in political empowerment is easier studied using micro lenses.

### **Gender and Local Governance**

The role of women in development has been given emphasis since the UN awakened the world with its first conference on women in Mexico in 1975. Since then, the UN has followed up its activities with its conferences on women such as those held in Copenhagen in 1980, in Nairobi in 1985, in China in

1995, and its regional conferences. More importantly, the UN has gathered country signatories in its conventions upholding different aspects of women's lives. Country signatories are expected to adhere to the terms of the conventions, such as increasing women's participation in decision-making levels in the bureaucracy (as much as 30% to the ideal 50%).

GEM considers percentage of seats held in Parliament by women, percentage of women administrators and managers, percentage of women professional and technical workers, and percentage share of women's earned income compared to that of men's earned income. For purposes of this paper, GEM is merely used as a take-off point for arriving at indicators for engendering governance. In this paper, engendering governance is the process by which we provide for greater power of women in governance. Governance, of course, is not government, but "the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels" (UNDP 1997: IV). The level which UNDP focuses on now is local governance. In our own definition, the process of engendering is making sure that gender relations provide for equal opportunities for male and female. If engendering as described here is skewed towards increasing women's participation, it is because the patriarchal theme which pervades Philippine society has left women behind in many aspects of life, especially in politics and governance.

Engendering will be discussed at the level of local governance, for a more focused approach, and in keeping with the present thrust of the UNDP. In the words of eminent economist Solita Monsod, "development which is not engendered is endangered." (Monsod, n.d.) The UN's focus is now on gender and local governance. In 2001 it called a meeting of Asian women mayors and legislators in Thailand. In 2003 it is calling for country

meetings in Manila with the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women as the coordinator of those meetings. We start with the premise that local governance must be engendered. In modifying GEM for local governance, we focus on three main concerns: (1) election of women local chief executives, (2) women local chief executives' advocacy of women-oriented programs; and (3) women's advocacy at the grassroots level. But engendering does not only mean direct roles of women; it can also mean other advocacies leading to women's greater empowerment. Thus, we add a fourth dimension, LGU initiatives for gender in the local government itself.

Of course, voting by women is a process of engendering. However, data on voter output by local government unit (LGU) is not available at this time. Another element that we can consider is the election of women to the local legislative councils, but data we have at the moment preclude longitudinal comparison.

### **Filipino Women as Local Chief Executives**

The Cory and GMA phenomenon is not unique in Philippine political culture. Gabriela Silang took over her husband's leadership of the Ilocano rebellion against Spain when he (Diego Silang) was killed. In the same manner, Magnolia Welborn Antonino ran for and won the Senate seat her husband was running for when he died in a plane crash. This is a theme we will find repeated throughout the Philippines' political history – women taking over the posts of husbands or fathers.

Our studies of women's political participation in local elections show an increasing trend of women's election into the office of local chief executive (LCE). Figures for 1992, 1995, 1998

and 2001 of elected provincial governors and city mayors show the following trend:

**Table 1.**  
**Elected Women Governors and City Mayors,**  
**1992, 1995, 1998, and 2001**

Position	No. of Female LCEs	No. of LGUs Reporting	% of Female LCEs to Total
<b>1992</b>			
Governors	5	75	6.67
City Mayors	2	67	2.99
<b>1995</b>			
Governors	8	75	12.0
City Mayors	4	68	5.9
<b>1998</b>			
Governors	12	75	16.0
City Mayors	7	77	9.0
<b>2001</b>			
Governors	13	79	16.4
City Mayors	13	96	13.54

The leaps can be seen as higher in 1998 and 2001. We see the same trends for municipal mayors.

For municipalities, data from the COMELEC in 2001 are still incomplete, the ARMM election results are not yet included. Furthermore, the listing of COMELEC is not gender disaggregated and we had to make manual identification of female names (which is never 100% accurate). For 1992, 1995, and 1998, we have these figures:

**Table 2.**  
**Elected Women Municipal Mayors 1992, 1995, 1998**

Year	No. Elected	No. of LGUs Reporting	%
1992	117	1,536	7.23
1995	125	1,536	8.14
1998	220	1,525	14.4

Using hand computations on the COMELEC list excluding ARMM, we counted 199 women municipal mayors. This may go higher than 220 when the list is cleaned up.

But we should look deeper in the statistics. The large leaps in 1998, as shown in the tables, are attributed to the mandatory end of term of the LCEs. Those elected during Aquino's time ended their terms in 1998. Those elected in 1992 ended their terms in 2001. For 2001, there are even larger increases, as can be seen in Table II.

Going back to our political experience, it is easy to see that the big increases in women's electoral participation is due to the fact that male LCEs made their wives or children run, and that these women substitutes won. Many members of the Lady Mayors Association call themselves as "breakers," meaning they ran to break the terms of their husbands (or fathers) so they (the husbands or fathers) could run again after three years. Of course, some of the male mayors won seats as governors or congressmen, and their mayor spouses are able to sit longer than three years. But for many women mayors, like Makati's Elenita Binay, their terms as accepted by them, is only three years.

We conducted two surveys of women local chief executives; one was in 1998 (covering those elected for 1995-98), another in 2000 (covering those elected in 1998-2001). The 1998 sur-

vey covered 137 LCEs (eight governors, four city mayors, and 68 municipal mayors) while the 2000 survey included 98 (two governors, five city mayors, and 91 municipal mayors).

We asked the manner in which they entered politics. In 1998, 34 said they “come from a political family” while 30 said their husband “came from a political family”. In 2000, the number of respondents who said they belonged “to a political family” was 51, and those whose husbands came “from a political family” was 54. (Tapales 1999; 2000; see Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**How Respondents Entered Politics, 1998-2000**

<b>Manner of Entering Politics (Multiple Responses)</b>	<b>1998 n = 80</b>	<b>2000 n = 98</b>
1. I come from a political family.	34	51
2. My husband comes from a political family.	30	54
3. Our family is prominent in the area.	33	40
4. I was encouraged by friends and relatives.	39	56
5. I was drafted by my socio-civic organization.	27	32
6. I was drafted by the party.	41	50
7. I ran on my own.	7	8
8. Others.	9	15

Unlike President Aquino who never ran for public office before her husband died, 28 of the 80 respondents in 1998 had held elective posts before (from congresswoman, mayor, *Sanggunian* member, or barangay official), and 30 of the 98 respondents in the 2000 survey did.

Nonetheless, even if the lady mayors did not hold elective posts before, the women LCEs, coming from political families had been exposed to the culture of politics as they grew up, or as they spent years with their husbands who had long been in politics. (Table 4)

**Table 4**  
**Positions/Occupations Held by Respondents**  
**Before Their Current Office, 1998, 2000 (Multiple Responses)**

Position/Occupation	1998	2000
1. Elective Position	28	30
Congresswoman	1	2
Local Legislator (Councilor, Provincial Board Member)	21	
Vice-Mayor/Vice Governor	2	18
Barangay Official	2	10
2. National Government Agency Administrator	2	9
3. Local Government Appointive Official	8	6
4. School Administrator	-	15
5. Teacher/College Professor	6	10
6. Businesswomen	11	25
7. Private Practice of Profession	17	9
8. NGO Leader	2	15
9. Others (Housewife, student, etc.)	3	10
10. Appointed to elective office	-	8
11. Other elective position (Constitutional Convention Delegate)		1

That kinship tie has been an important factor in politics, especially at the local level, is admitted by the female politicians themselves. In a television talk show, for example, Secretary Richard Gordon (then SBMA Chairman), said he told his wife Katherine (Mayor of Olongapo) that, "in the beginning, the Gordon name would help you. Later, you will be on your own." As Mayor Mary Jane Ortega of San Fernando City (La Union) who acknowledges her Ortega kins as governor and congressman said, "Kinship may be our (women) entry into politics, but what matters is really what we do when we are in office."



Both Gordon and Ortega have gone on to win awards for themselves and their cities.

### **Advocacy for Women's Programs**

Our surveys showed that for the 1995 and 1998 winners, projects conducted by the women LCEs are not really gender-tracked. Like typical male politicians they considered the importance of conspicuous infrastructure projects. At the same time, however, the women LCEs place a high priority on health and nutrition (predominantly for women and children).

In 2001, we were part of a project providing a profile/directory for lady municipal mayors. In the profiles we culled in their projects we determined where they put priority. Environment, infrastructures, and health topped their list. In fact, many of the municipalities where the women served won awards for environment (Clean and Green); and a few on nutrition (Green Banner Award) and health (HAMIS).

In their profiles, the women LCEs stressed the fact that their being women, especially their being mothers, give them the sentiments to prioritize environment, health and nutrition with infrastructure projects. These "feminine and maternal qualities" enable them to look after their localities with the perspective of a homemaker – cleanliness and beautification are for the household, while nutrition and health are for the family.

### **Advocacy for Women's Welfare**

However, governors and mayors do not have to be women in order to respond specifically to women's welfare. One way to engender local governance is to establish local government offices to push for the gender agenda. In many instances, in fact,

local government offices established to advocate for women's concerns have been initiated by both male and female LCEs, with the expected prodding of women grassroots leaders.

Probably the first such office catering to women was established in Bulacan in the early 90's by then Governor Roberto Pagdanganan. The provincial office, aptly called *Tanggapang Panlalawigan para sa Kababaihan*, is closely linked to the Provincial Department of Social Services. It was followed by the City Gender Offices in Davao City; Angeles City; Bacolod City, Balayan, Batangas, and most recently, in Quezon City and Marikina, which are the first two LGUs in Metro Manila to create GAD offices. Except for Marikina which has a woman mayor (Marides Fernando), the rest have male local chief executives. The Balayan office has in fact won a *Galing Pook* award because of its successful women oriented projects.

The Balayan project won for its Integrated Gender-Sensitive Health Program. It provides health assistance, legal assistance, education and information dissemination, economic and livelihood assistance, legislative advocacy and research, and counseling for women under stressful circumstances. (*Kaban Galing* 2002:84-87).

Beyond these formally organized offices are efforts of the women themselves at the grassroots, and those of other NGOs. In Irosin, Sorsogon, for example, community organizing of the major NGO, LIKAS (*Lingap sa Kalusugan ng Sambayanan*) have modules on gender sensitivity. Irosin women and men have impressed us with their gender sensitivity in our research forays in the municipality.

Barangay women in many parts of the country have also been involved in women-oriented livelihood projects, as seen in Bulacan. Beyond mere livelihood, women-oriented NGOs have gone into projects involving assistance to victims of rape and domestic violence. SOROPTIMISTS, the Women's Legal Bureau,

the Women's Crisis Center, are examples of some of those efforts. Women oriented NGOs also pushed for the establishment of women's desks in police sections, to assist female victims of violence. Former Vice Mayor Charito Planas of Quezon City prides herself in the fact that she established the first city police Women's Desk.

There are indeed signs of growing awareness for engendering local governance.

### **Expanding Women Empowerment in the Communities**

The discussion above points to efforts in engendering local governance. As signatory to UN conventions on women, the Philippine government has approached its compliance largely through legislation at the national level, which provide impetus for national agencies and local governments to follow.

Noteworthy laws on women are Republic Act 7192, the Women in Development and Nation Building Act, which provides equal access to women on credit, entrance to military schools, and other areas of life; RA 7160, the Local Government Code which provides for women's sectoral representation in local legislative bodies, and the Gender and Development Budget, which sets aside 5% of funds of government agencies to conduct gender activities, starting with the General Appropriations Act (RA 8250) in 1995. Efforts on the 5% GAD budget started in the national agencies. By 1998 the focus went to local governments. However, only RA 7192 is fully implemented. The Local Government Code notwithstanding, Congress has not passed appropriation for sectoral elections. The GAD budget, for its part, is not uniformly implemented, especially at the local level.

A study of the Asia Foundation documents the extent of the GAD budget implementation at some local government units (Budlender et al 2002). In Angeles City, for instance, despite a GAD budget ordinance and a GAD office, the absence of a GAD plan “provides the opportunity for some departments to assert that gender is not relevant in their work” (Ibid: 9). For its part, Bacolod City allows 5% of each department’s budget for gender rather than 5% of the LGU budget as a whole. (Ibid: 10) Nonetheless, in areas with little resources, gender programs are also conducted if the mayor is supportive. The research discussed the active role of the male mayor of Surallah, South Cotabato, who has tapped other sources in programs to mainstream gender. Anecdotal data shows that the 5% GAD budget is interpreted in different ways. Some municipalities use 5% of the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA). Whatever formula is used, however, as long as programs are conducted to enhance gender equality, we may consider a good start.

In local government experiences, what appears is the crucial role of civil society groups “in pushing for the integration of gender concerns in the budget process.” For instance, Angeles City and Bacolod City have “strong local women’s movements with dynamic NGO leaders”, who have successfully pushed for gender-oriented programs.

What seems to be necessary ingredients in engendering governance are: (1) national policies which serve as impetus for implementation in the grassroots; (2) active and committed advocates at the local level; and (3) local chief executives who are committed to gender concerns, be they female or male. The last one comes about not through orientation programs on gender for both male and female; there have been many of such in the last few years, but they are mostly attended by technical personnel.

Legislation is also an important factor in engendering local governance. The absence of elections for sectoral representatives in the local councils (which include women) may be a set-back, but gender sensitive legislators can still serve as policy advocates for greater gender equality. The GAD budget is only one mechanism. Within the local budget gender equality may yet be achieved if the councilors, following the LCE's initiatives, can consider gender equality as a main goal in budget legislation.

The electoral process is also crucial. Although the female mayors have shown to be as capable as their male relatives, the engendering process requires opening up of the ranks of elected officials to those outside the political dynasties. That is, however, a problem that can only be solved by changes in the political socialization of the Filipinos.

Local governance in the Philippines is not fully engendered, but so is the rest of the world. Nonetheless, the increasing number of women political officials, whether breakers or kins of politicians, is a matter of optimism. As they consider significant their roles as mothers in program priorities, they may be able to look more closely at the welfare of families, of women and children.

But, as so many cases in local government have shown, gender alone is not the way to engendered governance. Female and male local officials must all be aware of the need to redress inequalities among the genders through policy and action.

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