

## "Business Orphans": Maternity and Child Rights as Human Rights<sup>1</sup>

ROSELLE LEAH K. RIVERÁ

The unaddressed problem of national poverty is rearing a generation of Filipino "business orphans," children who do not receive adequate care from parents, particularly mothers who must work to make ends meet. In making ends meet, the mothers leave the children in the care of relatives or domestic helpers. Often income does not satisfy basic needs and mothers cannot make up for lost time. Also, some men perceive child care, like employment and housekeeping, the sole responsibility of the mother. Making parenting more difficult are insensitive and often unenforced maternity laws despite the Constitution's proclamations on the women's maternal and economic roles. For example, paternity leave and requiring employers of more than 15 women to establish workplace nurseries with trained personnel are routinely flaunted. Breastfeeding, the healthier and by far the more economic alternative to bottle feeding is not fully endorsed by government, giving infant formula manufacturers a free hand in conditioning mothers into believing the opposite. Consequently, the cost of bottle feeding eats up a substantial portion of the family income. This, along with unsympathetic maternity rights laws makes life very difficult for the business orphan and the working mother alike.

Her eyes welling with tears, Malou explains why her six-month-old son Ogie was in and out of hospital for almost three weeks. Desperate to earn a paltry P22 per hour in overtime, she was forced to remove her child from the factory nursery – which closes at 5 pm – and arrange a rota of well-meaning but inadequate childminders to look after him at home during her long working day. Taking Ogie out of the nursery – where she could breastfeed him during nursing breaks from the shop floor – meant she also had to abandon breastfeeding. Although neighbors and older children of relatives tried to take care of him, they did not sterilize water for his infant formula. Ogie – often left propped up in his cot with a bottle – developed a life-threatening bout of diarrhea.

Malou lost the income from her factory job while looking after him and spent more than a week's earnings on medicines alone.

Her monthly salary is only P4,200 (US\$140), which she earns sewing fashionable Nike and Reebok jackets for western consumers at the Sun-Moon Subcontractors in Teresa, Rizal, 20 kilometers from Quezon City, the capital of the Philippines.

<sup>1</sup>This paper was written as part of a fellowship granted by FANOS London.

Lorna works at another garment firm in the Mactan Export Processing Zone (MEPZ) in Cebu City, a provincial center in the Visayas, a group of islands in the central Philippines. She lives in a poor, urban community near the South Bus Terminal. Lorna has three children aged eight, seven and three. Her workday begins well before sun-up when she rises to cook her children rice and leftover vegetables for their lunch. After she leaves for work, the eight-year-old tries to look after his younger siblings.

"I ask my neighbors to help me out. They are busy too, but they are the only help available," Lorna says. She knows that the children often stray into the streets to play with their friends, which is a source of concern. Her older sons cannot attend school since she lacks money to buy supplies and books, but Lorna is hoping to claw back some of her earnings so she can educate her children. Her husband has been incapacitated with a liver ailment for the past three years, and her average monthly income of P3,500 is barely enough to feed the family, pay her transportation to the Zone, purchase medicines for her husband and repay money she owes to friends.

Tragically, Lorna's attempt to negotiate the tightrope between the conflicting demands of economic survival and motherhood failed when she returned to work after the birth of her youngest child. The seven-month-old was left at home with her older siblings who tried to bottle-feed her. The baby died from complications of diarrhea.

The MEPZ ranks second in terms of numbers of foreign firms operating and workforce size among the six major export processing zones (EPZs) in the Philippines, and 72 percent of the workers in the MEPZ are women.<sup>1</sup> According to Ruth Restauro, education officer for women's concerns for the non-governmental organization Cebu Labor Education Advocacy and Research Center (CLEAR), the main problem for women in the MEPZ is how to care for their children who must be left on an erratic basis with friends or older sisters or brothers. Relatives rarely live close by and working women's "pay is not enough to cover the salary of a [trained] caregiver," she says. "Shared parenting is not widespread in many communities," says Gwen Ngolaban, executive director of the Cebu-based NGO FORGE, which runs a community mobilization programme for women and men that raises issues of shared parenting and domestic work.

It is not only female factory workers who make hard choices. Rural poverty forces many women to migrate to the urban centers of the Philippines for work as domestics. Gina, 26, is a domestic helper for a family with two young children. Her second son Jason was only 18 months old when she left Bicol which is a 17-hour bus ride from Quezon City, where she works. She is separated and does not receive any support from her estranged husband. "Sometimes I go home. The last time was for two weeks during Christmas. My child calls me Mama Gina. He also calls his grandmother who cares for him Mama." Sadly, her small son hides from her when she visits. When she returns home to bring something for him he cries and says he doesn't want to go to her. "One or two weeks when I am on vacation is not enough [time] for him to be close to me, his mother. Still, I am more at ease knowing my mother is caring for my child. She does everything for him."

"Motherhood is not simply the joy of welcoming babies," says Inés Fernandez of Arugaan (Nurture), a women's support group which set up the Sun-Moon daycare nursery in cooperation with company personnel and a trade union in 1996. She believes that pregnant women and working mothers have special needs and need legal protection, not only to cover pregnancy and childbirth, but also even after childbirth.

The Philippines has – on paper – maternity laws, albeit weak ones; provision for paternity leave and even a law mandating employers of more than 15 women to establish workplace nurseries with trained personnel. All are routinely flouted by employers who do not wish to pay benefits and ignored by a government anxious to promote foreign investment.

"Unfortunately women's groups like Arugaan are not active in Cebu City. There are no childcare facilities at the MEPZ and no unions to fight for them. Employer hostility to attempts to establish collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) has kept the MEPZ non-unionized despite efforts of organizations such as the Federation of Free Workers and the National Federation of Labor.

Without enforced legal and social protection of working mothers and their children, "our babies become 'business orphans'," Fernandez laments.

### Persistent Poverty

Like women all over the world, most Filipino women must work as a matter of economic necessity, combining motherhood and child care with labor in the fields, as household domestics, market traders, or, in recent years, as cogs in assembly lines in purpose-built, foreign-owned factories in the EPZs. Women comprised 48 percent of the country's total workforce from 1986-1990<sup>2</sup> although in reality the female workforce may be considerably higher as the government does not recognize the large number of urban poor women who eke out a living in the "informal" sector as part-time market traders or providers of personal services such as cleaners and cooks for middle and upper class families.

As of 1990, the Philippines had one of the lowest per capita GNPs (US\$760) in the East Asia and Pacific region and was one of the most heavily indebted countries in the world.<sup>3</sup> While the country's per capita income has now reached more than P30,000, poverty both urban and rural is widespread and profound even though the government has calculated the per capita "poverty threshold" at only P8,969. Therefore, someone who earns as little as P240 per day should – by official calculations – meet his or her food requirement and other basic needs.

The Philippines remains predominantly agricultural, and about 44 percent of family breadwinners work on the land, with little security; many families combine agricultural work with other jobs to augment their limited income.<sup>4</sup> Because ownership of land is concentrated in the hands of a few families, well over half of the farms in the country are still tenanted and in general remain non-mechanized.<sup>5</sup> Displacement – and the hope that they may find a better standard of living in the cities and factories – has led to an exodus of small farmers and agricultural laborers and their families from rural areas to cities and other urban areas. Of the country's 15 regions, 10 have lost a significant segment of their population due to rural out-migration.<sup>6</sup> Most of these families end up in urban shantytowns. Joining the ranks of their urban counterparts, they now make up 70 percent of what is generally known as the urban poor.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Tess Umipig of Kababayan Andam Pag-undo ng sa Kaangayan Parasa Samar (Women Working for the Development of Samar [KAPPAS]) works with poor communities in Calbayog and Villareal in the poverty-stricken province of Samar. In Western Visayas, an island south of Luzon island where Metro Manila is found. According to Umipig: "Many of the women we work with come from large families of five to nine members. There are those with 13 children. Few are able to reach secondary school. Due to poverty, many women marry young and end up in Manila to work as domestic helpers."

According to the World Bank, in 1990 Metro Manila, where the country's employment and resources are concentrated, contained 14 percent of the national population and 32 percent of the urban population. Half the citizenry of the megalopolis were classified as poor and at least one third were squatters.<sup>8</sup>

Approximately 80 percent of EPZ workers are women. They are recruited for their supposed manual dexterity and patience for repetitive tasks, and because managers assume they are also more docile and so desperate for employment they will accept wages lower than men doing comparable work.

Women's wages in the EPZs are low. CLEAR cites a Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) inspection report of 56 MEPZ companies in 1995 which revealed that 41 percent were paying workers below the minimum rate of P3,501-P4,500 (US\$109-140) per month. DOLE findings also showed that 46 out of 56 companies violated health and safety standards.

### Maternity Leave...For Some

Maternity leave provisions in the Philippines have been in a state of flux during the last five decades. In 1952, when the International Labour Organization (ILO) revised its Maternity Protection Convention<sup>9</sup> and supplemented it to recommend a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave with cash benefits at 100 percent of past earnings,<sup>10</sup> the Philippines was in step on some counts. Its employers were mandated to grant employees 14 weeks of maternity leave on 60 percent of regular or average pay.

These benefits were slashed in 1973 when President Ferdinand Marcos issued Presidential Decree No. 148 which reduced maternity leave to just six weeks – two weeks before the birth and four after, albeit on full pay.

By 1977, maternity benefits were integrated into the Social Security System (SSS) – but only for women in formal, full-time employment. Conditions gradually improved again with private sector employees granted 45 days (nine weeks or approximately two months) leave on full pay, though this still fell far short of ILO minimum recommendations:

Not until 1992 was maternity leave extended to 60 days<sup>11</sup> though for government employees it still remains at just six weeks.<sup>12</sup> Finally fathers, in both the public and private sectors, were in 1996 granted seven days of paternity leave on full pay.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these modest improvements, many women remain unprotected by maternity laws; neither agricultural workers nor urban poor women working in the "informal sector" are covered.

To be eligible for maternity provision, workers must be signed up for social security benefits, and all businesses are required to enlist their employees for SSS membership. Not all companies comply with the law; some "do not uphold their commitments, either by not paying their own contribution to the fund or by retaining that of their employees."<sup>14</sup>

"Non-compliance with the SSS law is rampant in the entire country," admits Lydia Galas,<sup>15</sup> head of the legal division of the SSS in Davao City which has been working closely with local government in the renewal of business permits.

### **Child Care...On Paper**

In the wake of Cory Aquino's electoral victory over the corrupt Marcos regime in February 1986, proclamations of gender equality – in acknowledgement of the organized and visible presence of women's political and oppositional groups in the "People Power" movement – were written into the 1987 Philippine Constitution addressing women's maternal and economic role. Article XIII, Section 14 mandates the state to: "protect working women by providing safe and healthful working



conditions, taking into account her maternal functions, and such facilities and opportunities that will enhance their welfare and enable them to realize their full potential in the service of the nation."

Article 132 of the Labor Code, which stipulates that employers of more than 15 staff members should provide childcare facilities for workers, appears, at first glance, to give the Constitution "teeth" as far as nursery provision for working women is concerned. But a closer reading of the text shows that the provision of workplace child care is, in fact, discretionary. One reason is that the provision of nursery facilities is – despite the lofty language of Constitution – "a somewhat grey area in the eyes of the law," according to researchers.<sup>16</sup> The Article states, equivocally, that "in appropriate cases he [the Secretary of Labor and Employment] shall by regulations require any employer to establish a nursery for the benefit of the woman employees therein."

Because Article 132 fails to spell out the precise conditions under which employers must provide child care, it is unlikely that the government – in pursuit of foreign investment, particularly in the EPZs – will enforce more than the bare minimum of restrictions on foreign companies.

Another reason there are so few childcare facilities in the EPZs is management's well-documented preference for hiring young, single women, whom they assume will be more productive and reliable than married women with children and households to manage.<sup>17</sup> Although women can return to work in the EPZs after childbirth, if they want a factory nursery, the onus, it seems, is on vulnerable women workers to press for it. In 1995, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) set aside a modest P6 million for a Pilot Action Project on the Implementation of Child Care Facilities in Selected Regions. According to the late Director Au Sabilano of DOLE's Bureau of Women and Young Workers, "No one was submitting proposals. Women themselves are not actively pressing for this demand. Many are afraid that they would be laid off if they do so."

The childcare situation is so desperate that many working women in the EPZs, particularly rural migrants, must resort to the emotionally painful solution of fostering out their children with relatives in their home villages. Fortunately, in rural areas like Bicol and Samar, two provinces in the Visayas which are among the most poverty-stricken regions of the

country, there is a long tradition of "sharing of childcare," according to Dr. Tess Umipig of KAPPAS. Grandparents and older children take care of younger ones, especially the children of those forced to migrate to the cities for work. "People in the community borrow each others cooking pots...if a mother is not there to breast feed, her neighbors will wet nurse," she says.

In cities and urban slums without the help of the extended family and village traditions, NGOs like Arugaan have stepped in to help working mothers by establishing a few workplace nurseries. Established in 1996 – in cooperation with management and a trade union – its nursery at Sun-Moon was originally intended to give women a choice of childcare that would enable them to continue breastfeeding babies while working. The NGO soon discovered a more widespread need. Of the 22 workers (approximately 10 percent of the workforce) who were then pregnant or had children less than three years of age, only eight had relatives they felt were reliable enough to care for their young children while they worked.

Although employers are mandated by Philippine law to provide two 30-minute breastfeeding breaks for working women who need them, many women feel the provision is little more than "comical," according to Carol Añonuevo, who works as a women's educator with UNESCO. Proud that she breastfed all her four daughters, she believes a woman cannot simply rush off from a sewing machine or assembly line and breastfeed – all within 30 minutes. She must have more time to relax and emotionally switch gears to allow for the "let down" reflex of breastfeeding.

"We are not cows that can be milked mechanically," Añonuevo says indignantly.

### A Bottle Feeding Culture

With a scarcity of child care facilities – and not just in factories – many women find it difficult, if not impossible, to continue breastfeeding their children once their short maternity leaves have ended.

Cely Rochas is a young corporate lawyer with a medium-sized law firm in Makati, the financial district of the Philippines. Half of its staff are women. Her first child, now six years old, was born before she started



working, and she was able to breastfeed for 12 months. After the birth of her second child by caesarian delivery at the Capitol Medical Center, a private hospital, she took two and a half month's leave. She is also breastfeeding her second baby, but since going back to work she mixes breast and bottle-feeding. "It is so difficult to be apart from your baby. It hurts if your breasts are full and you have to express your milk." She admits that bottlefeeding has its appeal, since if you are away from your baby, "when you are bottlefeeding, there is not much physical discomfort."

Economics and career constraints of a modern lifestyle forced Rochas to return quickly to her firm: "It's no joke sending your children to school. The costs are exorbitant and we need to save." Although she works long hours, leaving for work at 6:30 am and often returning home after 10 pm, like most middle and upper class women, Rochas has a live-in domestic worker to cook, clean and provide childcare.

Typically, women who work in Makati's modern, air-conditioned offices only manage to breastfeed for a month, or even less, before their maternity leave is up, Rochas says. "Women believe that breastfeeding is next to impossible if you go back to work."

Even before they give birth, pregnant women receive a plethora of positive messages about bottlefeeding. Typical gifts a pregnant woman will receive at a baby shower (a party where gifts are given in anticipation of the birth) or a baptismal party usually include attractive feeding bottles and the latest in sterilizer technology (one that utilizes a microwave).

Many women are unlikely to sustain breastfeeding for another reason: they are bombarded with advertising for breastmilk substitutes, despite the 1986 Philippine Code of Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes and Related Products. The Code - derived from the WHO/UNICEF International Code of Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes - technically controls infant formula advertising by seeking to "protect and promote breastfeeding." It requires advertisers of breastmilk substitutes to include the message that "breastmilk is still best for baby," bans advertising which idealizes the use of infant formula, as well as forbidding manufacturers from distributing free samples to hospital maternity wards.

Although violators may face imprisonment of two months to one year and/or a token fine of between 1,000 and 30,000 pesos, few advertisements have been withdrawn or financial penalties imposed on companies which flaunt the law. The not-so-subtle messages of the multi-national baby milk producers – which imply that bottle feeding is easier, more convenient and as safe as breastmilk – directly counter scientific evidence which has conclusively demonstrated the nutritional superiority of breastmilk over substitutes.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months to reduce the incidence of infant death or ill health. Breastfed babies have fewer incidences of diarrheal diseases, unlike babies fed with substitutes which may be mixed with unsterilised water. In 1991 only 15 percent of Filipino households had sewerage facilities, and only 60 percent had access to piped water.<sup>18</sup> Mixing infant formula with dirty water can be life-threatening for infants and babies. Diarrhea is not the only threat. Research including the Philippines published by WHO in 2000 showed breastfed babies are six times less likely to die of infectious diseases in the first few months of life than babies who are not breastfed.<sup>19</sup>

While the advantages of breast over bottle for child survival are well known, breastfeeding also imparts health advantages for women, including reduced risk of breast or ovarian cancer, reduced risk of osteoporosis (brittle bone disease) and improved post-partum recovery. Exclusive breastfeeding under optimal conditions also provides women with at least 98 percent protection from pregnancy.<sup>20</sup>

Several studies show a decreasing trend in breastfeeding in the Philippines.<sup>21</sup> In a WHO report based on information gathered from 30 member nations in the Western Pacific, the Philippines is one of 16 nations found by the report to have less than 75 percent of mothers who "exclusively" breastfeed their four month old babies.

Another survey of 3,000 mothers with infants below one year old from 16 areas in the Philippines, conducted by the Maternal and Child Health Service of the Department of Health in 1994, showed that only 41 percent of babies were exclusively breastfed at any given period within zero to five months. The same year, researchers interviewed 1,256 women in poor urban communities in Davao City, the largest city on the

island of Mindanao, about why they stopped breastfeeding early on. The most common reason, cited by 21 percent of the women, was the belief that they had "no milk," although in fact this is a medically rare phenomenon.<sup>22</sup> Fourteen percent found breastfeeding was "a bother," while 10 percent said they were too sick. The women also raised concerns about the taste and consistency of breastmilk (it is normal for breastmilk often to look thinner than formula milk); others suffered from cracked nipples or inflammation of the breast.<sup>23</sup>

Infant milk advertising helps whip up women's fear that they cannot breastfeed their babies. While bound to throw in a line about "breast milk is best for babies," commercials console worried women who fear they have no milk – or those who have returned to work – that infant formula in a colorful tin decorated with a photograph of a serene and smiling infant – is just "a few scoops away."

Despite the Code, as well as the 1992 government-initiated Breastfeeding and Rooming-in Act – designed to comply with UNICEF's "10 steps to successful breastfeeding" under its "Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative" – hospital workers, including obstetricians and pediatricians, are often keen proponents of infant formula and reinforce prejudices against breastfeeding.

Merie, a 23-year-old farm worker, delivered her first child at the Regional Hospital 50 km outside Davao City center. "My doctor had my milk pumped. She told me that my milk was not fit for my baby to consume," Merie recounts. "For two years, I spent P280 for each can of milk I bought. I could have saved so much with the money I spent to buy milk."

For families earning a minimum wage, the cost of artificial feeding for a three month old baby, for instance, can easily consume one quarter of household income.<sup>24</sup>

Although the free distribution of infant formula in hospitals is officially banned, manufacturers continue to undermine government efforts to implement the Artificial Milk Code by playing on the Filipino cultural imperative of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) among the medical profession by ingratiating themselves with outright gifts to medical staff and their families at birthdays and holidays, or other services. Baby milk

producers now promote their products by hiring recent nursing graduates to go directly to homes and clinics in rural communities where they entice poorly paid health workers with incentives of gifts if they sign up a quota of mothers to use infant formula. Because of the Milk Code, infant formula manufacturers are also targeting the *hilot* (traditional birth attendants), as 70 percent of births in the Philippines take place at home and about three quarters of these are assisted by traditional attendants.

25

Given the aggressive tactics of baby milk manufacturers, coupled with less than progressive attitudes of some members of the medical profession, it is not surprising that in 1998 UNICEF determined that out of 456 Filipino hospitals or maternity clinics surveyed, only 21 met its minimum criteria in support of breastfeeding and could be officially designated "Baby Friendly."<sup>26</sup>

Many health advocates argue that controls on marketing of breast-milk substitutes should also be extended to marketing of weaning foods.

Pediatrician Sister Leonore Barrion, a pioneer in community-based primary health care, attends to a long line of mothers at her clinic at the Divine Word Hospital in the capital city of Tacloban, a province near Samar in the Visayas. One of her clients is Edith, 29 years old and a mother of three children. Sr. Leonore asks what her daughter Claire eats and Edith tells her it is Cerelac (a packaged baby cereal of processed rice or rice and powdered banana). "Why don't you feed her *lugaw*? (cooked softened rice): it is healthier," asks Leonore. Over a dozen varieties of fresh, native-grown banana and other fruits are easily - and more cheaply - available at any fruit and vegetable shop. She advises Edith to feed the children fish and fruits and not to give them soft drinks but instead to squeeze *dalanghita* (native oranges) which are much cheaper and more nutritious.

Many poor women are susceptible to radio or TV advertisements for packaged foods which denigrate nutritious traditional foods like *lugaw* for babies. Edith's husband is a fish vendor who may earn P100 on a good day and P80 if sales are low. Edith ekes this out to buy half a kilo of *galunggong* fish (poor man's fish) at P25 and 2 kilos of rice for P40 for the family's daily meal. She spends P15 for cooking oil and P7 for kerosene that she uses as cooking fuel. Laundry soap sells for P5 for a

quarter of a bar for the week's family laundry which she hand-washes. Cerelec is indeed a very expensive extra.

### Organizing for Change

Trade union activity represents one means, though under utilized, of pushing for working women's maternity and childcare rights; however, industries in the EPZs are notoriously hostile to unionism. Although Article 211 of the Philippine Labor Code recognizes "free trade unionism as an instrument for the enhancement of democracy and the promotion of social justice,"<sup>27</sup> the process of gaining union recognition is arduous and by no means automatic. At least 20 percent of a given workforce must vote for union representation in a certification election which must first be approved by the DOLE and company managers. Officials of labor centers confirm that many women workers – often the sole wage earner – are reluctant to vote for union recognition, fearing they will be identified as troublemakers by managers and be fired.<sup>28</sup>

Trade union activism is also time-consuming for women who put in long working days to begin with. As Restauro from CLEAR explains: "Women choose not to join trade unions. [Given their limited]...time, they would rather spend it with the family."

Many women also believe that union activities are men's activities, according to Restauro. Figures for union membership in 1994 indicate that women are far less organized (36.7 percent) relative to men (63.3 percent). Men dominate the leadership of labor organizations – 98 percent of federation heads and 84 percent of local presidents are men.<sup>29</sup>

In 1996 CLEAR initiated a Labor Unity Forum, which has proven to be an effective lobby group of major federations of workers in Cebu province. According to CLEAR Executive Director Pepe Gasapo, "There is no labor organization with a clear and definite intervention for women. If we want such a programme, it must be mainstreamed."

According to Tess Borgonos, an active organizer of MAKALAYA (Manggagawang Kababaihang Mithi ay Paglaya or Women Workers Fight For Freedom), the most common gender-related issues included in collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) are related to family planning. According to Article 134 of the Philippine Labor Code, a company with

at least 200 employees must maintain a clinic to provide free family planning services including contraceptive pills and intrauterine devices (IUDs) for women workers. However, enforcement of Article 134 is not routinely monitored and trade union leaders have had to insist on it in CBAs. Other benefits include granting pregnant workers light duty assignments, maternity leave, including financial assistance during leave, and paternity leave.

"We push for the inclusion of gender-specific provisions in the CBAs. We make use of a grievance machinery and I think the breakthrough is that now, in CBA negotiation sessions, women are there to serve as panelists. Because of seminars and discussions on women's needs, committees have been created to reflect their interests during CBAs," Borjoños says.

LEARN (Labor Education and Research Network), a non-government organisation based in Manila, works with the labor organisations, particularly with the National Union of Workers in Hotel, Restaurant and Allied Industries (NUWHRAIN), the Caucus of Independent Unions (CIU), composed of government employees, and KAMAO, composed of factory-based workers. Since 1989 it has conducted a gender programme as part of its educational activities. LEARN's partner unions have been able to negotiate more entitlements than the law stipulates. These include initiatives on the relief of pregnant women from physically strenuous jobs, extended maternity leave and financial benefits.

Many believe that the single channel of trade union activism to gain working women's reproductive rights is too narrow. Gasapo of CLEAR feels the issue of women's practical needs should be raised to the level of policy advocacy. His colleague Restauero also sees the need to prioritize differently and widen the push for women's issues among working women whose daily survival concerns make union participation difficult.

"It is next to impossible to expect young women to join trade unions," she believes. "They need to be reached through their communities." Therefore, CLEAR has ventured into community-based organizing of women workers.

Haley Atienza, a young, male organizer who coordinates the community childcare programme of the NGO FORGE Cebu, in Visayas Central



province, concurs. "We cannot only be involved in "hard" politics...we also have to address practical needs." FORGE – which advocates for urban land reform – uses childcare as an entry point in organizing and mobilizing communities.

FORGE community organizers, who are mostly men like Atienza, have benefited from gender sensitivity training – initiated in the 1980s by women trade union leaders – offered by Quezon City development NGOs. Atienza and his colleagues, in turn, hope to sensitize husbands and partners of over-worked women who, researchers estimate, spend 45 hours each week on domestic activities compared with 12 hours spent by men.<sup>30</sup>

A contributing reason why men may shun childcare and other domestic chores is that those who are perceived as doing too much to help their wives may acquire the label of being *ander di saya*, (under their wives' skirts). In a 1984 study of women workers in multinational plants in the Bataan, Luzon, EPZ, researchers found that only 3 percent of married women interviewed were able to delegate childcare to husbands; in the majority of cases, older siblings looked after younger children while their mothers worked.<sup>31</sup>

Men do attend FORGE meetings, which raise issues such as the need for gender-sensitive shared parenting and shared domestic work, but there is resistance to change. Mang Rommel, a rickshaw driver whose slum organization is assisted by FORGE, expresses confusion. "I cannot understand why we should allow boys to play with dolls," he frowns.

Dayday, leader of a mother's association which works with FORGE, believes men's actions speak louder than any words. "The little children are all out on the streets, while their mothers are inside washing piles of clothes. Why are the men hanging out with their friends at the corner store instead of helping their wives?" she points out.

Ngolaban agrees that even men who attend FORGE gender sensitization seminars do not always put theory into practice. "They see themselves as open, but in reality they just want to control ... women." Sighing deeply, she notes that for men, "internalization is a long, slow process."<sup>32</sup>

Given many men's reluctance to involve themselves in the duties of family life, it is not surprising that the push for paternity leave in CBAs emanated from female trade union leaders rather than their male colleagues.<sup>12</sup>

"How can women's interests realistically be 'mainstreamed' if most of the decision makers are men?" asks Dr Junice Demeterio-Meigar, executive director of Likhaan. Policy advocacy without parallel power building among women could be futile, she warns.

### **A Mother's Right to Work, a Worker's Right to Mother**

Currently maternity rights laws in the Philippines impose a heavy weight of conflicting demands on the individual and provide little support for the mother. In 1952, on paper, employed women enjoyed 14 weeks maternity leave. Now maternity leave is significantly shorter (12 weeks) with an inadequate increase in cash benefits – and only for those in the "formal" sector.

Dr. Mel Ben of the Local Government Assistance and Monitoring Services (LGAMS) of the Department of Health highlights the need to support breastfeeding by tackling inadequate maternity leave provisions, as well as the virtually non-existent childcare facilities at places of work while also creating a stronger policy on marketing breastmilk substitutes. The promotional activities of companies selling infant formula must be monitored and enforced, the poor training and lack of political will in the medical sector addressed, Ben believes. Community support groups for breastfeeding mothers should also be encouraged.

While supporting specific initiatives such as Ben's, many women's health and rights activists believe that larger social attitudes and prejudices toward women must change. According to Ines Fernandez of Arugaan, Filipino society simultaneously idealizes motherhood and ignores the conditions in which women must mother.

"Our society is completely unsympathetic towards motherhood," she challenges. "There is a tendency to romanticize motherhood," she adds, particularly by those ignorant of the obstacles that women face in their homes, communities and workplaces in caring for the very young.

All women, Fernandez believes, "must be assured of support systems which will allow them to successfully combine their multiple roles."

"Government programs and labor sector initiatives that unquestioningly accept the productive/reproductive and public/private divisions of standard political and economic frameworks do not work for women," says Dr. Sylvia Estrada-Claudio, researcher and women's health activist. ●

### Endnotes

1. Aganon, M. del Rosario, R et al. "Strategies to Empower Women Workers in the Philippine Economic Zones". Research paper (unpublished), March 1997
2. National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. "Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development 1995-2025". November 1995.
3. Chart, S and McKelaine, C. *Women of a Lesser Cost, Female Labour, Foreign Exchange & Philippine Development*. Pluto Press, London 1995, p45
4. Family and Income Expenditure Survey. IBON Facts and Figures, Vol. 19, No. 17, 15 September 1996.
5. Agrarian Digest in IBON Facts and Figures, Vol. 19, No. 17, 15 September 1996.
6. IBON Facts and Figures, Vol. 19, No. 17, 15 September 1996.
7. Presidential Commission on Urban Poor in IBON Facts and Figures, Vol. 19, No. 17, 15 September 1996.
8. Children of a Lesser Cost, Op cit ref 3 p57
9. International Labor Organisation Convention No. 103 on Maternity Protection (revised), 1952
10. International Labor Organisation Recommendation, No.95 on Maternity Protection, 1952.
11. Republic Act (RA) 7322, 5 February 1992.
12. Conditions of work digest - maternity and work, Vol.13 1994. International Labor Office, Geneva.
13. Republic Act (RA) 8187, 11 June 1996.
14. Women of a Lesser Cost, op cit ref p68
15. "2500 Coby firms kept workers away from SSS", *Philippines Daily Inquirer*, September 22 1996
16. Women of a Lesser Cost op cit ref 3, p152
17. Women of a Lesser Cost, op cit ref 3 p149
18. Women of a Lesser Cost, op cit ref p69.
19. UN Wire, 7February 2000
20. Lactational Amenorrhea Method (LAM) is the informed use of breastfeeding under certain conditions as a contraceptive method. LAM gives women at least 98 percent protection from pregnancy provided three criteria are met: [1] the mother fully or almost fully breastfeeds her child; [2] she has not begun to menstruate again since giving birth; and [3] the child is less than six months old.
21. Williamson, Nancy, 1990. "Breastfeeding trends and Breastfeeding Promotion Programme in the Philippines". *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1990 March.

- 22 Marie Jansson, Nordic Work Group for International Breastfeeding Issues (NAFIA Sweden). 1999. Personal communication.
- 23 Sanchez, Rosena D. and Juarez, Mariceth. 1994. Community-based Research and Advocacy on Reproductive Health among Urban Poor Women In Davao City. Davao City, Philippines: Development of People's Foundation.
- 24 "Breastfeeding: The Best Investment", World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action, 1998; also personal communication, Dr. Natividad Davana, Baguio General Hospital, Baguio, the Philippines.
- 25 Safe Motherhood Survey, Department of Health, 1993
- 26 Country Profiles (BFHI analysis paper). Nutrition Section, UNICEF, February 1999.
- 27 Women of a Lesser Cost, op cit ref 3 p.135
- 28 Ibia
- 29 Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics, Department of Labor and Employment. Current Labor Statistics. Manila, July-August 1996.
- 30 National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development 1995-2005. November 1995
- 31 Women of a Lesser Cost. op cit ref 3 p9
- 32 Health Action-International Network (HAIN), Manila, 1991