

Beijing +10— Celebrating Gains, Facing New Challenges A Philippine NGO Report*

This Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report is one of many reckonings that women's movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around the world have been doing during the past year or so. As we near the end of the decade after the Fourth World Conference on Women (or the Beijing Conference), we take stock of what have been accomplished and what remains to be done vis-à-vis the Platform of Action that was adopted in 1995. The twelve reports that comprise this series or compendium of assessments of Philippine compliance with the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) recognized the advances made at the same time that these stressed the issues—both old and new—that beset the full implementation of the *BPA*.

Gains, Gaps, and Losses

Gains

Over the years following the Beijing Conference, the Philippines can rightly claim several gains across many of the BPA critical areas of concern. This report would like to celebrate the achievement of the NGO community, among which are:

- *Continued NGO militancy against the government's macroeconomic policies.* Some women's groups and NGOs continued their advocacy in addressing the macro context of poverty and economic issues (globalization, unfair trade, and structural adjustment programs) and critiquing government policies from women's perspective. This persistent critique and the lobby for pro-women laws and policies provided a two-pronged approach to ensuring that women's interests are protected and promoted.

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- *Working on shared issues.* Even as women NGOs differed in the immediate issues they face and the approaches they use, their common struggle to highlight and address women's issues in their respective sectors unite them. For points of convergence (poverty issues, violence against women, trafficking), women NGOs and academe-based activists have created powerful networks that engaged Congress and other government agencies for pro-women legislation or programs.
- *Offering some good practices.* The past decade has seen the flourishing of good practices from women NGOs and community women's groups. Among these are developing livelihood and leadership skills of community women, creating *transformative* leadership among women leaders, and building capacities of institutions and establishments to implement certain laws (anti-sexual harassment). There have likewise been alternative or innovative economic (livelihood and credit assistance), health, and anti-VAW programs; environmental schemes; and media programs to promote the discussion of women's issues and garner support for women's agenda.

Networking among NGOs and government-NGO collaborations have been a means as well as a gain in itself. The latter has resulted in a number of achievements, as follows:

- *More women-friendly policy environment.* As a result of relentless NGO advocacy with their allies in the Philippine Congress, there had been a flurry of ratifications of conventions and optional protocols, and pro-women legislation and executive policies. *This was most evident in the areas of violence against women and children (VAWC) and institutional mechanisms for women.* There were also policies that promote women's representation in bodies that have been mandated by law, and women's access to resources. Moreover, at least for the first half of the post-Beijing decade, government committed itself to a comprehensive women's health framework that identified ten priority areas in reproductive health.
- *Advances in gender mainstreaming.* There had been progressive policies that added muscle to the gender mainstreaming efforts of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW). Foremost among these is the adoption of the 30-year *Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development* and the rolling plan, *Framework Plan for Women*. These also included the institutionalization of the gender and development (GAD) budget, structures and mechanisms, and GAD plans by the various agencies and branches of government.
- *Greater women's political participation.* Women have been named to law-mandated bodies, peace-monitoring groups, and similar councils. Women's party-list groups garnered seats in the House of Representatives. Women's

participation in elective positions, however, marginal, has been increasing.

- *Some support for women's agenda.* As a result of GAD policies of government and the advocacy of women's movement activists, Women's Studies programs or centers have been created in many state and private institutions of higher learning. There has also been increasing support for the adoption of women's agenda among NGOs, and in government and NGO initiatives as part of the peace-building process, and of environment, anti-poverty, human rights, and other areas of advocacy and action.

Local (sub-national) women activists in a *few provinces, towns and cities* areas have been successful in pushing local governments to pass women's or GAD *codes*, create GAD mechanisms, and fund GAD programs and projects. Similarly, *children's* rights advocates have pushed for the creation of municipal and barangay councils for the protection of children. In some areas, local councils could be sympathetic to cases of victim-survivors of violence against girls.

- *Some improvements in service delivery* There have been steps—albeit small—in securing social protection for informal sector workers (many of whom are women) in both government and non-governmental programs. There has also been an increased infusion of credit resources for women, with more than one million women reportedly receiving micro-finance assistance from mid-2002 to early 2004. *How credit provision could be more pro-poor and pro-women, given the increasing tendency towards commercialization, is now being discussed at the policy level, given the critique as well as inputs from women NGOs and people's organizations.* There are great *potentials* for the delivery of comprehensive and integrated services to VAWC victim-survivors, which, *however*, may be derailed by budget cuts and the lack of readiness of government agency personnel to implement the anti-VAWC laws.

Finally, there have been improvements in some aspects of the lives of women and girls. Among these are increased access of girls (and boys) to education, more households with potable water, and a wider variety of jobs available to young, educated women (and men). As will be apparent in the succeeding subsection, however, none of these and the aforementioned gains come as unqualified successes

Gaps and Losses

Looming over the discussion of gains or achievements is the fact that the pro-women policies and programs continue to be undermined by government adherence to economic and trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation, aggressive exportation of labor, and anti-people environment policies (see next section). The persistent fiscal crisis has likewise eroded GAD efforts and social sector budgets, and any inroads that have been made toward improving people's well being. Continuing destruction of the Philippine environment is compromising the safety and security of everyone—women and girls, men and boys. More specifically, these continue to erode the livelihood base of women in the rural areas and in indigenous communities.

Some specific gaps and losses in the various areas of concern include the following:

- *Weak or lack of political will or commitment to implement pro-women policies.* This has resulted in budgets not being allocated or released, or, in the case of women's health, redirected. It has also undermined the implementation of laws that mandate women sector representation in local legislative bodies, establishment and maintenance of services and programs for women, enforcement of the anti-sexual harassment law in the private sector, and designation of women NGO-activists in councils or structures with oversight on or responsibility for implementing pro-women laws. The enforcement of policies has also been weakened by the absence or lack of monitoring. If ever monitoring was done, the data or information collected were rarely sex disaggregated or gender differentiated.
- *Retreat from support of women's reproductive health programs.* Probably the most notable loss that the women's cause has suffered during the past four or five years, has been the renegeing of government on its commitments to support women's reproductive health (see discussion in next section on "fundamentalisms.")
- *Lack of political influence by the NCRFW.* While the NCRFW has been successful in promoting gender mainstreaming in the government bureaucracy, it does not possess the clout to influence the overall development agenda of government. It also relies heavily on the support of national elected and appointive leaders who may not be sympathetic to the women's agenda. The frequent turnover of officials and technical personnel in government requires that NCRFW and GAD focal points conduct GAD briefing sessions and training programs over and over again.

- *Limited coverage of women's programs.* As the Women and Economy and Women and Poverty reports have pointed out, livelihood programs for women are generally micro in scale and focus and have limited chances of sustainability. Microfinance has become commercialized and less responsive to women in poverty. They are also rarely connected with the structural problems that bedevil women, especially those living in poverty.

In addition, the reports have noted losses or "retreats" in some areas of women and girls' lives. Maternal mortality rate, though decreasing, remains high. The total fertility rate continues to exceed women's wanted fertility. The quality of education continues to deteriorate, compromising the future of girls and boys and as evident in the continuing poor fit of education and employment and deskilling of many women (and men) overseas workers. Indigenous women suffer from increasing marginalization. Employment gains of women are too fragile, and could be, as they have been, easily lost with even the smallest hints of economic and political crises.

Finally, women's concerns and gender issues that require attention continue to persist. Sexism prevails in the media, in school, and the workplace, among other places. Violence against women and girls remains high. Indigenous women and women in rural areas continue to be held hostage to military and development aggression. Legislation, policies and programs for women or children continue to be blind to the vulnerabilities and needs of girl children.

Recurrent Themes and Issues

Political Agenda and National Policies

Probably like many states, the Philippine state suffers from schizophrenia arising from conflicting international commitments. On the one hand, it has been signatory to human rights, international labor conventions, and similar agreements including the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Programme of Action of the United Nations International Conference on Population & Development.

All these commit the Philippines to social and equity goals. On the other, it has signed World Trade Organization and similar agreements that

privilege markets and the private sector over the social needs of the majority of the population. This dissonance between rights-equity-equality imperatives and market goals that persist at the global level is reproduced in the Philippines, as the various reports have shown. While the Philippines does have its Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD), Agenda-21, and various *programs of action* (for the Girl Child, Informal Sector, and Indigenous Peoples, for example), it also promotes the Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization Act (AFMA), the Mining Act, and the Fisheries Code all of which subvert the interests of subsistence and small-scale farmers, fishers, and indigenous peoples. The continued dominance of the pro-market forces emphasizes the lack of political muscle of agencies within government that are tasked with the social and gender equality agenda, making their efforts to transform the mainstream both laudable and suspect. The former, because they face considerable odds; the latter, because the odds (privileging of big business operations) have created a mainstream that is at once a “men’s stream” and a “maelstrom.” This makes uncritical “gender mainstreaming” efforts—an example of a social reform initiative—suspect, unless the mainstream is reoriented to serve the interests of the many, instead of the privileged few.

During the past decade, the country has undergone—and continues to experience—one or another form of political crisis: ouster of an elected but repudiated president through “people power,” highly contested national elections (particularly that of May 2004), armed conflict in Mindanao and other places, and, most insidious of all, graft and corruption in government. Amplified by the political uncertainties are the busts and booms, a cycle that has been closely linked to the national election cycle. These have all affected women in different ways, eroding whatever initial gains there might have been from the post-Beijing Conference. The flight of investment in the wake of the slightest rumors of political instability has resulted in job losses for women as well as men. Skirmishes in various places have shattered lives, particularly those of women and girls. Meanwhile, corruption has redirected public funds away from under-funded social services to private pockets.

Corruption has fed the chronic fiscal deficit that the government has been financing through increasing indebtedness, particularly foreign debts. The fallout from the debt service and the attempts to curb the deficit has been felt in all the BPA critical areas of concern, as there has been a drying up of funds going to the education, health, and social welfare sectors.

Cutting off support for programs and services that address women's needs and concerns should not only be attributed to the fiscal crisis, as it is also shaped by the political agenda of the incumbents and their close alliance to other institutions, such as the Catholic Church. A change in political leadership—both at the national and local levels—can bring about shifts in support for women's programs. This was most apparent in the area of women's health, in the wake of the withdrawal of government support for reproductive health programs.

Corruption, fiscal crisis, or shifting political agendas have manifold effects on women and girls, as they are not only among the primary beneficiaries of these sectors; women are also the principal service providers, and are, therefore, vulnerable to losing their *jobs*. Moreover, the implementation of the much-celebrated anti-violence against women and children (VAWC) and anti-trafficking laws can also be seriously compromised, leading it to the same fate of previous pro-women and pro-girl laws. These and other effects on women and girls are traced to political and economic problems that have either their roots in or their effects amplified by globalization, another theme that runs through the various reports in this series.

Globalization

In the Philippine case, it is clear that globalization led to the financial, economic, and social crisis and has had a negative impact on most of the critical areas of concern contained in the Beijing Platform for Action. The crisis worsened poverty among women, and severely affected most women's access to economic and other resources and benefits: remunerative employment, breakthrough credit, viable market, and arable land. As indicated in the previous section, the budget for education suffered, together

with most teachers who are women and the access to education of girls in rural areas and indigenous communities. The problem with health is not limited to low budgetary allocations; it extends to creeping privatization of services and to very high prices of drugs in the “free” pharmaceutical market dominated by transnational corporations. Gender and development (GAD) initiatives are in danger due to budget cuts.

Poverty resulting from the crisis is associated with more violence against women and girls in the form of prostitution, trafficking, and abuse related to economic stress; continuing feminization of migration leads to more violence against undocumented workers in SALEP (shunned by all locals except the very poor) jobs. Globalization and the crisis have led to the violation of the economic rights of women: the right to gainful employment, to security of tenure and to social protection in general, as well as to fair and equal treatment. Social and cultural rights: the right to health, education, and to be free from violence, *are also being compromised.*

Some new developments in science and technology associated with globalization have led to the displacement of women in many areas (e.g., agriculture, garments) and to their employment in some areas (such as semiconductor assembly work, call centers). Advertising through media and the Internet has fostered consumerism and cultural homogenization. In some ways, new technology has facilitated the sexual exploitation of women, or has the potential of harming women (e.g., genetically modified organisms or GMOs). Environmental degradation and the food insecurity associated with it result from globalization, with negative effects on women.

Globalization, however, has given rise to countervailing forces, which have maximized new communication technology to strengthen social movements and civil society initiatives regionally and globally. This is manifested quite strongly in international women’s networks, which have gained much ground in terms both of advocacy work and direct action.

The Women's Movement and Change

As evident in the discussion of the gains during the post-Beijing decade, much of the gains can be traced to the unrelenting efforts of women's groups and women's movement activists at the national level and in various provinces, cities, and towns. The push for the different pro-women laws came from *the* women's movement, often coalitions of women's groups that have long been working on the issue (VAWC, trafficking, solo parents), or in conjunction with other NGOs or civil society organizations and advocates within government (early childhood care and development, child protection laws, and the pre-Beijing laws on sexual harassment and barangay day care centers).

Many of the innovative programs and services—education and training, support for VAWC survivors, economic projects for women in poverty, reproductive health programs for women and girls, environment campaigns, and peace and human rights initiatives—originate from women NGOs and activists in the academe, independently or as part of broad coalitions or alliances of civil society organizations. As important as the contributions of the women's movement to the development of women's capabilities and the delivery of services is the adoption of government of the most promising women NGO practices, which has magnified the reach of NGO programs. The women's movement imprint is most evident in the women and children's protection units that one finds now in many government hospitals, the Women's Studies programs in both state and private colleges and universities, women's or gender codes and mechanisms in many local government units, women's reproductive health programs and services, and the livelihood-cum-empowerment anti-poverty programs, to name a few.

At the same time that members of the women's movement are lobbying the state for the passage of pro-women laws, standing for elections as party-list candidates, and partnering with government agencies, other women's groups continue *their* critique of government's macroeconomic policies and development strategies, emphasizing the ways these are further marginalizing, disempowering and disenfranchising a large number of women. Women's groups constitute a vocal member of coalitions cam-

paingning against corruption and globalization in its many guises (economic and trade liberalization, privatization, and sale of the country's patrimony), and promoting peace, sustainable development, and transformative leadership.

Although not explicitly discussed in the papers, women's groups in the country have kept their links with or have joined new regional and international women's networks. This was noted in the areas of women and health, human rights, Women's Studies, women and the environment, labor unions, informal sector workers, migration, trafficking, and the like. As mentioned in the "Women and the Economy" report, Philippine women's groups and other NGOs are also part of global or international trade and economic campaigns directed against the WTO and similar international organizations that dictate the terms and strategies of development of such a country as the Philippines.

The relationship of women's groups (including activists in the academe) with government and international donors (bilateral agencies, foundations, and multilateral organizations) has always been problematic. Convergence of interests has resulted in many partnerships or collaborations. However, donor funds have not only supported the agenda of women's groups but have shaped it, as well. This has led some to suspect a conspiracy—redirecting women's attention and energies to issues of greater import to the donor than to the women activists.

A Few Emerging Issues

Funding and Women's Agenda

The reflection on the vulnerability of women's agenda to such forces as funding is a persistent issue. Other issues, which are new or emerging in the context of the Philippines, have been alluded to in the papers and in discussion during the 21 January 2005 validation workshop. One concern is related to the promotion of a rights-based approach to development and other fields. While laudable, separation continues to be noted between human rights and gender advocacy. This can be a product of the fact that two government agencies are involved and tend to promote their

respective agenda. Some human rights groups and women NGOs suggest that training in human rights (including rights-based approaches) be left to NGOs, rather than the government's Commission on Human Rights. Specifically, women's groups that are already involved in both human rights and gender advocacy can be involved to conduct the training and promote the integration of gender and human rights, as applied in different fields.

ICT and New Vulnerabilities

Another issue arises from the application of information and communication technology to nefarious uses, such as pornography featuring girl children, cybersex targeting children and youth, and trafficking in women and children. The difficulty of monitoring and apprehension pose additional challenges to anti-VAWC and anti-trafficking efforts whose resources are already spread too thinly, and whose enforcement personnel are ill equipped to prevent and apprehend violators or abusers.

Fundamentalisms

A third area of concern is the rising fundamentalism, whether political or faith-based. The "post-September 11" anti-terror campaign of the Bush administration rests on a conception of security from the barrel of a gun, and one imposed by one group (the US) on the other (non-US allies and a profile of the imagined enemy as of a certain ethnicity, faith, and political ideology). To counter this, there is need to craft alternative notions of peace and security, and ways of resolving conflict and confronting terrorism. As the "Women and Armed Conflict" report articulates it: "Women should be able to share their perspectives and processes in creating a just, diverse, peaceful and free society that co-exists and co-regenerates with nature."

In the Philippines, the unholy alliance of the Church and the State on issues of women's reproductive health offers a different kind of politics-and-faith nexus. Here, as with other forms of fundamentalism, control of women's body is at issue. This is apparent in the withdrawal of state support for different kinds of contraception that will leave choice of method

in women's hands, the continuing demonization of the abortion and sexual rights issues, and the like.

Rights and Economic Entitlements of the Marginalized

Last in this short list of emerging issues pursues the rights and economic entitlements of marginalized groups of women: the very young, the old, lesbians, and women in rural areas and in indigenous communities. As women's human rights in the Philippines are being gradually recognized, respected, protected and fulfilled, there is now a need to ensure that this does not only apply to women in dominant classes or groups, but also to those who are physically located too far from the centers of power, or those who are socially and politically excluded on the basis of their sexuality or their age.

Future Directions

The good practices mentioned in the various reports provide a glimpse of the future, since they embody the constructive energies of women who are striving to make a difference at the local level that could in turn generate a larger influence. These practices have certain common characteristics—they employ a strong women's perspective, they build on the organized strength of the women involved, they follow principles of participation and accountability, and they acquire sustainability over the long run through the women's exercise of their own resource-generating, lobbying and networking skills. Although beginning at the micro level as women struggle to change their lives at the personal, household, and community spheres, they manage to influence political discourse and practice, leading to changes in local policies, and the mainstreaming of gender in local governance. The notion of transformative politics is beginning to take root among women who want to veer away from traditional notions of power towards a more participatory, responsive, inclusive, and accountable mode. This dovetails with attempts to develop local economies with the participation of all the significant stakeholders—NGOs, people's or-

ganizations, private business, overseas Filipino investors, and others—so that local resources are maximized to respond principally to local needs. Women's economic empowerment initiatives can flourish within this context, as their markets can be developed and sustained. Even successful interventions addressing violence against women and children are framed within a facilitative local environment. The new rights-based framework, with its emphasis on the inalienability and indivisibility of economic, political, social, cultural, reproductive, and sexual rights, can be better tested and operationalized within the more manageable local domain, as organized women struggle together not only for their economic and political entitlements but also for control over their bodies and their lives individually and collectively.

“Going local” is also consistent with the new environmental ethic women have taken from the ecological movement, with the goal of sustainability impelling initiatives towards ensuring food security, safeguarding and renewing natural resources, recycling wastes, etc. This new environmental consciousness, which often merges with various forms of women's spirituality, also emphasizes a sense of solidarity, complementarity, and connectedness which women's movements generally adhere to in practice, despite their diversity, divergence, and sometimes dramatic differences. Thus, various contingents of the Philippine women's movement, although acting separately and sometimes competitively, do come together in a broad-based effort such as the ten-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Local initiatives may therefore be seen as part of a developing continuum that has influenced governance in areas where the women's movement is strong. Such initiatives can be broadened and replicated to create change from the bottom up, even as national, regional, and global women's networks seek to recast policies and programs at the macro level to facilitate the flowering of efforts at ground level. Oppressive structures created by history and built on hierarchies based on resource status, gender identity, ethnicity, age, and other differentiating factors can thereby be transformed by human agency—by the force of women coming together to build a future they can call their own.