

# **Some Notes on the Status of Women in Cebu**

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## **Introduction**

Given the dearth of gender-specific data about women in Cebu, this study will mainly present an overview of their status, focusing on their domestic role, their perceived role in society as well as their participation in decision-making in the home and in the community. It will specifically describe the condition of urban and rural women in the home, the participation of rural women in agricultural production and decision-making as well as the perception of both rural and urban women of Cebu regarding their role in society. A brief discussion on the prospect of empowering women in Cebu is included at the end of this paper, highlighting the efforts of Cebu women's organizations like the Cebu Urban Poor Women's League (CUPWOL) and the Panaghugpong sa Inahan sa Argao (PINA).

The data included here are drawn from the unpublished research conducted by the students in my classes on Politics of Development and Philippine Development Strategies and from the files of the WRCC on peasant women in a Cebu municipality. The analysis is supplemented with secondary data from government agencies and by my own observation and experience in educational work among the women sector. A brief profile of Cebu is herein given to provide the context for the situation of Cebu women.

## CEBU: A Brief Profile

Historically, Cebu is one of the oldest trading centers of the Philippines. It was in Cebu where the Spanish conquistadores first established a permanent settlement under the leadership of Miguel Lopez de Legaspi. Cebu is located in Central Visayas (Region 7). It has a total land area of 5,088 square kilometers (508,844 hectares)<sup>1</sup>. Latest National Statistics Office (NSO) figures indicate Cebu's population to have reached 2,645,735 in 1990. Almost half of this 2.65 million are women. A large number of this population is engaged in manufacturing and services.

Cebu's past provincial administration envisioned Cebu to be the next economic miracle in Asia. Its economy is reported to be fast growing. At the time when the Philippines was experiencing a negative growth rate in the 1980s, Cebu garnered a positive growth. According to the National Economic Development Authority Region 7 (NEDA 7) Cebu's economic performance has risen to 128% since 1986<sup>2</sup>. As of 1990, NEDA reported that the Gross Domestic Product of Cebu increased by 3.59%; its export earnings increased to 14.99% and its investments to 17.41%.<sup>3</sup>

The province also boasts of its Mactan Export Processing Zone which hosts 42 firms, mostly multinationals engaged in labor-intensive manufacture and assembly of different goods ranging from garments to electronic products.<sup>4</sup> Cebu also is the educational center of the South with six universities and 39 colleges, including medical and technical schools.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the glowing statistics attesting to a "Cebu Boom," the island and its people seem not to be spared from the economic

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1 Provincial Planning and Development Office, *Cebu Socio-economic Profile 1991*, p.1.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Quoted in Women's Resource Center of Cebu Inc., "Situationer on Cebu Women" (unpublished)

4 PPDO, *op cit.* p.2.

5 *Ibid.*

crisis. The Population Commission estimated that 50% of Cebu's total population still live below the poverty threshold. NEDA-7 and Department of Labor and Employment(DOLE) 1992 statistics place 40% of Cebu's population to be below the poverty line.<sup>6</sup> During this year, the Center for Research and Communication estimated around 1.365 million Cebuanos to be earning below the region's poverty line set by NEDA at P2,173 a month for a family of six. In 1988, the Philippine Commission on Urban Poor reported a total of 37,857 urban poor families living in Cebu.<sup>7</sup> Despite the so-called "Cebu Boom," unemployment remained at 13.3% and underemployment at 29.09%. Of the total number of unemployed in Cebu, 65.15% are women and only 34.85% are men. Only 136,000 women are working in Cebu's manufacturing sector according to the Visayan Human Development Agency (VIHDA), an NGO serving the workers' sector of Cebu.<sup>8</sup> In real terms this implies that between 38,000 to 75,000 of Cebu's labor force are unemployed and about 224,000 are underemployed, having work for less than 40 hours per week. Furthermore the inflation rate of Cebu in 1991 was set at 18.90%. During the last quarter of 1991 a Communications Research Center (CRC) analyst observed that there was 16% to 57% increase in the prices of food, beverage, tobacco, clothing, housing rental and basic services. Inflation when translated in real terms means a high cost of living and increasing economic difficulties especially for the unemployed Cebuanos.

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6 WRCC, *op cit.* p.2.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

## **Cebu Women : Initial Findings From An Exploratory Study In Two Urban Barangays of Cebu**

An exploratory study was undertaken by the students in my "Politics of Development" Class in 1991.<sup>9</sup> This survey ascertained the participation of men and women in development. It included a sample of 100 men and women, all residents of two urban barangays of Cebu. It specifically probed into the activities that men and women do inside and outside their homes, their participation and involvement in community organizations and their perception on the role of women in society. This study modified the time use measure developed in the Institute of Philippine Culture (IPC) study.<sup>10</sup> Without completely applying the IPC methodology, this study explored the work engaged in by males and females in the home and their involvement in market activities to augment family incomes. The findings of this survey reveal that women still performed most of the domestic work such as cooking, washing the dishes, cleaning the house, ironing and sewing or mending clothes. Women who had children admitted spending most of their time in childcare. Almost all of the respondents (92%) accepted that women still perform more work at home than men. The data from this preliminary study appears consistent with what is nationally established — that women remain tied to their traditional domestic work. It is important to note that respondents reported that husbands and family members tend to share household chores. Although males share in the domestic work, females accepted the fact that they still allot more time for household activities to augment family income such as operating a "sari-sari" store, raising livestock, selling insurance and handicraft, like making artificial flowers and doll's dresses. Given women's increased involvement in market activities therefore it

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9 UP Cebu College, Political Science 112, "Exploratory Study on the Participation of Men and Women in Development in Two Selected Barangays of Cebu", Unpublished, March 1991

10 Virginia A. Miralao, *Women and Men In Development: Findings From A Pilot Study*, Quezon City: Institute of Philippine Culture, 1980

can be concluded that Cebu women are placed in a double bind, spending long hours for both domestic and productive activities.

### **Perceptions of Respondents Regarding Working Mothers**

The survey also looked into the perceptions of respondents regarding wives leaving home to find work. A large majority of both single and married males (70%) favored wives working outside the home. Almost all of the single married females likewise looked favorably at working mothers. About 22% males and 6.25% females were undecided on the issue. Although males appeared to favor working mothers they specified that women should work on a part time and not a full time basis so that women will not neglect their responsibilities as mother and wife. It appears there is still an ambivalent attitude towards working wives. This view is indicative of the persistence of the traditional attitude that woman's place is in the home. Half of the males even expressed gender prejudice by saying that "light jobs" are appropriate for women. Among the jobs considered appropriate for women are office work, teaching, sales and sewing. On the other hand, almost one-half (49%) of males noted that any job is appropriate for a woman provided she has the qualifications. As for the reason why women work, respondents cited that they were mainly motivated by financial considerations. They pointed out the need for additional income given the economic difficulties confronting their families. A large number cited desire for self-fulfillment as a secondary reason for working.

### **Perception of Women's Role in Society**

Findings of the exploratory study cited earlier showed that the majority of both male and female respondents in the study recognized that women play important roles in society.<sup>11</sup> A majority said women were equal with men. More than one fourth (27.12%)

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11 There were multiple responses.

specifically indicated that women are partners of men in promoting progress. About 18.63% saw women as co-builders of the country with a role in people's development. Likewise, another 18% emphasized the traditional role of women as mother and wife. About 11.86% perceived women as inferior to men while 3.39% noted that women's role is still unrecognized in society. About five percent underscored the role of women in promoting faith in God and in never being abusive to one's husband. The survey did not ascertain whether significant changes are taking place with regard to male views of women.

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Table 1  
Perception of Women's role in Society  
Among Urban Respondents

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Same or Equal with Men	59.34%
Partners of Men in Progress	27.12%
Co-builders of the Country	18.63%
Traditional Role as Mother and Wife	18.64%
Women as Inferior to Men	11.86%
Women's Role unrecognized by Society	3.39%
Promote Faith in God	5.08%

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## **Rural Women : Initial Findings on the Status of Women in a Provincial Barangay**

Initial data gathered by WRCC involving 144 rural women respondents residing in a barangay 37 kilometers away from Metro Cebu reveal that rural women of Cebu, like their urban counterpart, still perform most of the housework. Almost all of the respondents have family incomes below the poverty line with a mean income of P400 per week. Majority have either reached or graduated from elementary schools.

A large majority of the rural women included in the study expressed in Cebuano that: "*dili sayon, lisud ug bug-at ang among papel sa panimalay.*" (Women's role is not easy, it's burdensome and difficult). Almost one third of the rural women (31.3%) saw their role as partners of men (*kaabag o katambayayong sa kalalakin-an*). (See Table 2) About 46.5% specifically indicated their role as mother or guide for their children (*paggiya sa kabataan*). About 12.5% viewed that they have a role in societal development (*pagpalambo sa katilingban*). About 6.9% saw themselves as equal to men. (*Patas o pareho lang.*) Almost all appeared to maintain a traditional view that women's primary role is that of being a mother, wife and housekeeper. Nevertheless there seems to be a growing awareness among a number of organized rural women respondents that their place is not only in the home. This is probably attributable to their active involvement in peasant organizing.

Data on rural women's work in the home substantiate the findings of many published studies that women perform a greater variety of housework than men. The initial computation of the average number of hours a peasant wife devotes to both domestic and farm or market work ranges from 14 to 15 hours a day. Women who work to augment family incomes like selling vegetables and farm products still have to perform the traditional domestic work of cooking and cleaning the house and taking care of the children. It was however mentioned that some form of sharing in household work existed. As to whether such sharing significantly diminishes the burden of women needs further verification.

**Table 2**  
**Rural Women's Perception on**  
**the Role of Women in Society**

	Frequency	Percentage
As mother/guide of the children	67	46.5
Partners of men	45	31.3
Contribute Toward Societal Development	18	12.5
Equal Status with Men	10	6.9
"Queen of the Home"	1	.7
No Response	3	2.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>100%</b>

***Peasant Women in Production***

Do rural women of Cebu actively participate in production?

Available data on rural women of Cebu show that women are actively involved in income generating and work to ensure their family's survival. They declared that since their husbands' income are barely enough to meet their basic needs, women sell vegetables, root crops, fruits and also raise pigs and chicken. A documentation of a Cebu-based NGO, the Farmers Development Center of Central Visayas, also revealed that women have joined



cooperatives and engaged in income-generating projects, like “camote” chips, catsup, soap and coco-vinegar production.<sup>12</sup> A WRCC (Women’s Resource Center Cebu) study further shows that aside from housework, women participated in agricultural production. Almost a majority (47.2%) helped in selecting seeds, in planting and in the care of farm animals. About 10% helped in clearing the fields while one fourth (25%) applied fertilizers. A majority likewise indicated that both men and women participated in the harvesting and marketing of farm products.

### ***Decision Making in Rural Homes***

The WRCC study quoted earlier explored the decision-making patterns in the homes. Respondents were asked to identify who decides on their children’s schooling, on buying and selling of property, punishment of erring children and transfer of domicile. A big majority (69.4%) responded that both husband and wife decide on children’s schooling. Only 4.9% noted that deciding on children’s schooling is solely the father’s domain. The wife decides on family purchases according to 46.5% of the respondents. This is probably true because it is the wife who usually budgets for the family needs. However, 45.8% also stated that husbands and wives jointly decide as regards making purchases. In terms of selling or disposing of property, almost all respondents answered that this is a conjugal undertaking. In disciplining children, majority (69.4%) considered this as a task of both parents. Almost one fourth (23.3%), however, indicated this to be mainly a woman’s task. More than a majority (62.5%) recognized that it is the mother who often imposes punishment on erring children. Data seemed to suggest that there exists a recognized authority of women particularly in financial matters and in enforcing discipline on children in the rural homes included in the study. In deciding transfer of dwellings more than one fourth (26.4%) answered that this is mainly the husband’s prerogative. Ten per-

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12 Farmer’s Development Center, Plow Share “When Peasant Never Lost Sight of Their Dreams: The Story of Pina,” Vol. 2, No. 1, Nov.-Dec., 1990, pp.11-13

cent (10%) said that domicile transfer is a joint decision of husbands and wives. More than half (52%) noted that decision on transfer of domicile lies on all responsible members of the family not just the husband.

In finding "sidelines" to augment family incomes, majority of the rural women noted that they undertake their own initiative to help the family survive. About 26% said the husband still decides on whether the woman should be allowed to work. Almost one third (30.6%) indicated that both will have to decide on this issue. As regards borrowing of money, a majority (68.8%) stated that this is a collective decision of husband and wife. Eleven percent said it is only the husband who decides, while 17.4% responded that it is the wife who decides when borrowing money. In determining the number of children the couple would like to have, respondents of the study indicated that it is not only the husband who solely decides. Initial findings of the decision-making patterns in rural homes of Cebu show some sharing in the decision making in homes. This will have to be validated to distinguish what is real from what is hoped for by the rural women, many of whom are actively involved in women's organizations in their community.

### ***Participation of Women in the Community***

After the United Nation's proclamation of the Decade for Women in 1975, the integration of women for development has been given impetus both globally and nationally. In the Philippines, both government and non-government organizations (NGOs) have undertaken various initiatives to harness women's potentials for development. It is therefore significant to explore women's participation in community affairs. Such participation could be a gauge in determining whether women's interests have been effectively articulated and whether governmental decisions reflect their aspirations.

Past studies have shown that women have limited participation in, and access to, decision-making bodies.<sup>13</sup> The exploratory study on urban Cebu communities tends to confirm this finding.

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13 Miralao, *op cit.* p.42.

Survey data indicated that only 33.33% of single females and 46.8% of married females are members of community organizations. On the other hand, the males (60%) appeared to be more actively involved than the females (40%) in community organizations. The study, however, failed to establish whether gender and marital status significantly determined participation in community affairs.

As regards the type of organizations joined by the respondents, data indicated that women's involvement concentrated more on religious and socio-civic organizations, special mother's clubs dealing with nutrition, beautification and women's welfare and development projects. Meanwhile, men joined occupation or work-related organizations like labor unions, professional groups as well as religious and athletic or sports associations. Interviews corroborated that women's involvement in community organization has been minimal except in urban poor areas threatened with eviction or where non-governmental and people's organizations are present. In a number of Cebu barangays people are involved in socio-economic livelihood projects, low cost housing programs as well as cooperatives spearheaded by NGOs.

### ***Extent of Women's Participation***

Empirical data in this area of inquiry remain inadequate. However, the UP Cebu Political Science 112 class survey data reveal that majority of both male and female respondents indicated that they attended organizational meetings most of the time. Only 16.67% of the females attended meetings always. This pattern seems to suggest that since women are often left in the home they often represent their families in organizations like Parents-Teachers Associations. Concerns of the home and family probably have cut down the number of hours women spend for community activities. Female respondents reported spending two hours at the most for organizational meetings. The lack of time has caused the non-involvement of one third (33.33%) of the respondents in community affairs. About 22% attributed their non-involvement to their lack of awareness of the existence of these organization while 33% indicated they are not interested or found the organizations in their barangays irrelevant.

Data seem to indicate women's participation in community affairs but this is limited to religious and civic activities such as fiesta celebrations, beautification campaigns and nutrition drives. Although women are now involved in local governments, such involvement is still minimal.

No systematic inventory of women's organizations in Cebu has yet been made, but observers can witness the emergence of women's organizations which recognize the need to organize women towards their full participation in changing an inequitable social system that oppresses and discriminates against women as members of a particular gender and class. The succeeding discussion will present the prospects for women empowerment in Cebu, focusing on the experiences of selected women's organizations.<sup>14</sup>

### **Prospects of Women Empowerment in Cebu: The Experience of CUPWOL and PINA**

In the Philippines, women's organizations emerged in response to both internal and external conditions. The proclamation by the United Nations of the International Decade for Women in 1975-1985 provided one of the external impetus that encouraged research, discussions and programmes focusing on women's plight. But it was the deepening of political and economic crisis brought by the 20 years of Marcos misrule that spurred women to join the broad anti-dictatorship movement. The Martial Law years provided a favorable climate for the growth of women's organizations that openly protested against organized sex tours, "mail order brides," exploitation of women in export processing zones, human rights violations, reported cases of rape

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14 Due to lack of data, initiative of other Cebu women's groups towards women empowerment are not included here.

and violence perpetuated by the militarization of the countryside, among others.<sup>15</sup> The extreme degradation and increased suffering endured by many Filipino women during this period were the rallying points for women's groups and the conditions for transforming the national women's movement into a more militant one with feminist orientation.<sup>16</sup>

In Cebu, the women's movement seeking gender equality and an end to all forms of economic and political oppression and discrimination was an integral part of the broad movement to dismantle the Marcos dictatorship. The seeds of the militant feminist organization were sown in 1983 with the formation of INA-Sugbu.<sup>17</sup> This organization put up by the wives of the striking workers in a Cebu glass factory was, however, shortlived. It was only in 1985 that a progressive women's federation was formally launched.<sup>18</sup> This women's group was named Babaye Alang sa Kauswagan, Kaangayan, Kalinaw ug Demokrasya (Women for Progress, Equality, Peace and Democracy.). Its acronym BAKUD means arise in Cebuano. In a provincial convention in February, 1986, BAKUD already included three women's groups based in Cebu City, one in Toledo City and another group from Lapu-Lapu City, on nearby Mactan island.

Under the leadership of BAKUD, mobilization pressing for women's rights and welfare was undertaken. Various symposia, consultations and leadership training for women were conducted. However, this modest gain in women's organizing in Cebu was affected by the rise of Anti-Communist Vigilantism in the province in mid-1987.<sup>19</sup>

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15 Luzviminda G. Tancangco, "Women and Politics in Contemporary Philippines," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 4 (Oct. 1990), p.328. See also Marra Pl. Lanot and Maita Gomez discussions on the women's movement in Sr. Mary John Mananzan, (ed.) *Essays on Women*, (Institute of Women Studies, St. Scholastica's College, 1989)

16 Miralao in Santos-Maranan quoted in *Ibid.*

17 Women's Resource Center of Cebu, Inc. *BAKUD*, Vol. I, No. 1 (August, 1991 p.2.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

The "Red Scare" and threats posed by the vigilante groups did not spare women's organizations. But in 1988, women's organizing in Cebu regained its momentum. Through an NGO, the Urban Poor Development Center, mothers were organized in 13 urban poor communities of the city. Confronted with the problem of demolition in 1990 as a result of the government's implementation of the Metro Cebu Development Program, women solidified themselves into the Cebu Urban Poor Women's League (CUPWOL).

### **Empowering Urban Poor Women: The Experience of CUPWOL**

CUPWOL aims to become an effective working federation truly working for the empowerment of women through capability building programs and promotion of women's rights and welfare.<sup>20</sup> Organizationally, the policies and programs of the federation is decided by the General Assembly. The Executive Committee, a small body elected by the Assembly, is responsible for program implementation. Various committees are created such as Education, Organization, Socio-Economic Projects, Finance, Direct Services to undertake specific programs or projects. In an interview with 27 CUPWOL members, they related that they joined the organization in order to help promote community and self-development. Forty-four percent (44%) also noted economic considerations as a reason for participation. The women of CUPWOL revealed that they encountered some obstacles in joining community affairs. Many cited the burden of household responsibilities, child care and demands for economic survival as hindrances to their involvement. However, the majority (75%) attended meetings and participated in organizational activities such as fund-raising and seminars. The organization also undertook mobilization of women to express opposition to oil price increase, demolition and other anti-poor policies of the government. CUPWOL members interviewed expressed egalitarian views regarding man-woman relationship. Although a minority (3.75%) expressed belief in women's superiority over men, being the "haligi sa

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20 CUPWOL Constitution (unpublished).

pamilya" (foundation of the home), all members interviewed believed that women have an important role to play in the community and that women should not be confined to the homes. They held the view that household chores must be shared by males and females, although they admitted that they still perform the usual household tasks since their husbands are working for their survival. On the issue of women's oppression, CUPWOL members interviewed were not categorical in their responses. More than one-fourth (29.6%) realized women's oppression and discrimination in our society while about one-half qualified their views by saying that women's exploitation is now resisted due to growing women's awareness of their rights. They likewise acknowledged the existence of prostitution and wife battering which they considered an affront to the dignity of women.

The women of CUPWOL dream of owning land (96%) since almost all are "squatters." They also aspire for better education and life for their children (85.18%) and the advancement of their community (66.6%). Likewise, more than a majority (59.25%) dream of realizing gender equality (11%) as well as success of their women's organization. Seven (7%) percent specifically aspired for the victory of the working class while 3.7% wanted the election of a pro-poor president.<sup>21</sup> The women of CUPWOL believe that these dreams are worth pursuing and express confidence in the women's capacity to realize these.

### **Women Struggling for Self-Sufficiency and Empowerment: The Case of PINA**

The Women's Resource Center of Cebu, Inc. provides educational services to four peasant women's groups of Cebu, one of which is the Panaghugpong sa mga Inahan sa Argao (PINA).<sup>22</sup> PINA expanded from a peasant organization called PIJA (Pinaghugpong sa mga Inahan sa Jungao Argao) which was based

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21 The interview was conducted prior to the May 1992 elections.

22 Farmers Development Center, "When Peasant Never Lost Sight of Their Dreams: The Story of Pina", PLOWSHARE, Vol. II, No. 1, December, 1990, p.11.

in only one barangay. It was organized in 1984 after typhoon "Nitang" struck and devastated Cebu. Due to massive destruction of peasant homes, crops and properties wrought by "Nitang," women peasants started to organize themselves to confront the need for relief and rehabilitation of their community. They sought assistance from Catholic Relief Services of Cebu (CARITAS-Cebu) which gave a regular supply of yellow corn and milk for their mal-nourished children. Instead of mainly providing dole-outs, the organization saw the need to educate mothers about nutrition and health care. Members agreed to give three pesos (P3.00) donation in exchange for the corn and milk given them. A sharing scheme was devised wherein P1.55 was returned to Cebu-CARITAS and P1.45 was left for the organization.<sup>23</sup> In 1986, PINA expanded its endeavors. It established income-generating projects such as "camote" chips, patis, toyo, and banana-catsup making. They also learned coco-processing, soap making and vinegar production from the Indigenous Technology Resource Station. Swine-dispersal was also undertaken to augment family income. The growth of the organization was not without problems. In the last quarter of 1987, PINA was affected by the militarization campaign in Argao. The organization was branded as "subversive" and its members were made to "surrender" to military authorities. This military strategy diminished the membership of the organization. However, its core leadership persevered with socio-economic projects such as bulgur wheat and corn distribution. In 1989, PINA affiliated itself with AMIHAN, a national federation of peasant women whose vision and aspiration is to free the peasantry from the bondage of the soil and to attain the fullest development of the peasant women.<sup>24</sup> PINA today is recognized by the military and by the local government officials for its laudable efforts in pursuing self-sufficiency programs for its members. At present it has three chapters with a total membership of more than 100. Farmers Development Center of Central Visayas assesses PINA's socio-economic programs as "slowly and continuously reaping

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23 *ibid.*

24 *ibid.*



economic gains for its members in the community.”<sup>25</sup> It vigorously pursues its vision of peasant women empowerment through sustained education about peasant problems and gender related issues. Its leadership is hopeful that through its education program, their members will be equipped with tools of analysis and become assertive in family decision-making and in changing patriarchal attitudes that pervade our society. PINA realizes the need for peasant men and women to unite for the empowerment of their sector, which to them means changing the oppressive land-tenure system, implementing a genuine agrarian reform program and pursuing national self-reliance.

## **Conclusion**

This presentation on the general status of the women of Cebu is constrained by the incompleteness of data. However, interesting insights have been derived from available studies. Initial data have indicated that the Cebu rural and urban poor women remain confined to the traditional role as mother, wife and housekeeper. Despite increasing participation of the Cebu women in agricultural production, market activity and in the industries, women's household work has not diminished. Women admitted that they still performed most of the housework as compared to the men. While some form of sharing in decision-making in the homes was documented, there seems to be a persistence of the traditional view that the woman's place is in the home and that the domestic role should not be sacrificed. Men included in the study preferred that their wives work on a part-time basis only. Likewise, women who desired to work were primarily motivated by financial considerations rather than the desire for self-fulfillment. An increasing awareness of the positive role of women in society was revealed in the study. A significant number of the respondents believe women have an important role to play in development. The experiences of CUPWOL and PINA exemplify this emerging awareness of the potential of women and the need to participate towards their empowerment.

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25 *Ibid.*

**This article did not explore the wide gamut of women's issues. There is a need to collect more information on women of Cebu which could serve as a basis for a comprehensive program designed to liberate women.**