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Women in Power and Decision Making^{*}

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Strategic Objectives:

- G1. Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making*
- G2. Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership (BPA, 1995)*

The Philippines has gained significant steps in the last 20 years after the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA). Women are gradually being recognized as active leaders in both the local and national spheres. The country even fared well in key gender empowerment measures of international organizations. For example, it ranked 5th out of 136 countries in the 2013 Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum. But this does not automatically translate into genuine economic and political participation of women.

There are more women entering electoral politics but their numbers are still not proportionate to those of men. For those who have succeeded in joining the political bandwagon, there is always a question regarding their accomplishments which is not asked of their male counterparts.

SITUATIONER: WOMEN IN POLITICS²

The country is known to have had two women presidents, but this does not discount the fact that women's political representation has never reached the critical mass of 30% at the national or local levels of government. The proportion of men is still overwhelming compared with women. In both Houses of Congress from 1995 to 2013 as well as in provincial boards and municipal/city councils, women never comprised more than 30% of the total membership. The highest percentages of the total membership that women reached

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¹ Data are from Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2014; National Statistics Coordination Board [NSCB], 2013; Center for Legislative Development, 2000; Senate Economic Planning Office, 2006; and NSCB, 2010

were in the recent 2013 elections: 25% of the Senate and 27% of the House of Representatives. For local government posts, the numbers are not encouraging when looking at the proportion of women: Governors (18 women out of 80), Vice Governors (11 women out of 80), Mayors (332 women out of 1591) and Vice Mayors (265 women out of 1590). In the Supreme Court, it was only recently that we had a woman Chief Justice.

| Percentage of Women (%) | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | 1995 | 1998 | 2001 | 2004- | 2007 | 2010 | 2013 |
| LEGISLATIVE | | | | | | | |
| Senate | 16.7% (3/24) | 16.7% (4/23) | 12.5% (4/23) | 17% (3/23) | 7% (6/24) | 13% (4/24) | 25% (4/24) |
| House of Representatives | 10.6% (24/221) | 12.3% (27/220) | 17% (36/211) | 16% (37/236) | 19% (52/269) | 23% (65/285) | 27% (79/289) |
| Provincial Board | 11.2% (76/677) | 12.9% (93/722) | 17% (120/727) | 17% (124/740) | 16% (125/790) | 16% (120/734) | No data |
| City/Municipal Council | 13.9% (1840/13252) | 16.8% (2141/12711) | 17% (2198/12665) | 17% (2253/13148) | 18% (2335/13140) | 19% (2314/12417) | 20% (2668/13166) |
| EXECUTIVE | | | | | | | |
| Cabinet | 12.5% (3/24) | 12.5% (2/16) | 17% (4/24) | 14% (3/21) | 22% (5/23) | 15% (3/20) | 21% (6/28) |
| Governors | 11.8% (9/76) | 17.3% (13/75) | 19% (15/74) | 19% (15/77) | 23% (18/80) | 21% (16/76) | 23% (18/80) |
| Vice Governors | 17.11% (13/76) | 11.5% (9/78) | 13% (10/77) | 9% (7/77) | 16% (13/80) | 13% (10/75) | 14% (11/80) |
| Mayors | 8.1% (129/1598) | 14.5% (233/1607) | 15% (241/1635) | 15% (244/1621) | 17% (274/1594) | 20% (294/1504) | 21% (332/1591) |
| Vice Mayors | 8.27% (132/1597) | 11.1% (179/1607) | 12.4% (192/1548) | 14% (222/1599) | 14% (230/1595) | 16% (245/1505) | 17% (265/1590) |
| JUDICIARY | | | | | | | |
| Supreme Court | 6.7% (1/15) | 13.3% (2/15) | 6.7% (1/15) | 33% (5/15) | 14% (2/14) | No data | 20% (3/15) |

As one source observed, “In the 2010 national and local elections, data from the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) indicate that only 18.4% of elective positions were won by women candidates, compared to more than 81% for men. This is hardly a rise in the 17% women garnered in the 2007 elections. For local government positions, women’s share is even lower after the 2010 elections, with only 17.2% of them winning elective posts while 82.8% were won by male politicians” (Franco & Reyes, 2012).

It is also important to recognize the appointments of women in critical positions such as the Supreme Court Chief Justice; the Ombudsman; Secretaries of the Departments of Justice, Social Welfare and Development, Labor

and Employment; and the Chairpersons of the Commission on Human Rights, Commission on Higher Education, Commission on Filipinos Overseas, the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process; and the heads of the Government Panel for Peace Negotiation, Bureau of Internal Revenue, among others.

Critical to having women in power and decision-making is the opportunity to push for legislation that advance gender equality and women's empowerment. The country has passed several landmark laws on women such as the Anti-Rape Act, an Act Eliminating Trafficking in Persons, the Magna Carta of Women, Anti-Sexual Harassment Act, Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act, and just recently, the Responsible Parenthood/Reproductive Health Law.

Strategic Objective G1: Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making

GOVERNMENT COMPLIANCE WITH THE BPA

The gender mainstreaming framework and strategies endorsed by the Philippine Commission on Women and other government agencies have partially succeeded in implementing gender-responsive programs, projects and activities. Specifically, the Women's Empowerment, Development and Gender Equality (Women's EDGE) Plan 2013–2016 contains a chapter on empowerment and gender equality in the civil service, and another on politics and governance that encourage participation and representation of women in decision-making posts.

There are several legislations that provide opportunities for women's political participation and representation. Among these are RA 7160 (Local Government Code), RA 7941 (Party List Law), RA 7192 (Women in Development and Nation Building Act), RA 8425 (Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act) and RA 7688 (Giving Representation to Women in the Social Security Commission), among others.

RA 9710 (The Magna Carta of Women or MCW) is instrumental in setting affirmative action measures in the following areas:

- “the number of women in the third (3rd) level positions in civil service/government shall be incrementally increased within the next five years to achieve a 50–50 gender balance;
- at least 40% of membership of all development councils from the regional, provincial, city, municipal and barangay levels shall be composed of women;
- women's groups and grassroots women leaders shall also be represented in international, national and local special and decision-making bodies;
- provision of incentives to political parties with women's agenda and the integration of women in their leadership hierarchy; and

- measures to encourage women leadership in the private sector” (Philippine Commission on Women [PCW], n.d.)

More specifically, the Civil Service Commission also adopted policies that support gender balance in executive positions, such as CSC Memo Circular No. 8 series of 1999, a policy that promotes gender equality at all levels of positions in the civil service (Civil Service Commission [CSC], 2015). The latest data from the Philippine Commission on Women indicate that women occupy 42% of CES or third level positions, 1% lower from last year (PCW, 2014).

BASIC SECTOR/CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS’ PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING/CONSULTATIVE BODIES

The 1987 Philippine Constitution guarantees the “right of the people and their organizations to effective and reasonable participation at all levels of social, political and economic decision-making....” And that “the State shall, by law, facilitate the establishment of adequate consultation mechanisms.” (Article XIII, Section 16 of 1987 Philippine Constitution).

Section 28 of the MCW Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) specifically identified government agencies which “shall implement capability building and leadership formation programs as well as undertake affirmative action measures to enable grassroots women leaders to effectively participate in the decision- and policy-making bodies in their respective sectors. These include the Presidential Agrarian Reform Council and its local structures, community-based resource management bodies, National Agricultural and Fishery Council (NAFC), National Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Management Council (NFARMC) and the like.

The same section provides that the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) “shall ensure that its sectoral councils shall have at least 30% women membership and shall have gender equality concerns incorporated in their sectoral agenda.”

In compliance with the MCW IRR, NAPC issued Administrative Order (A.O.) 21, series of 2011 mandating that at least 30% of national sectoral assemblies and council members of the 14 basic sectors should be composed of women; one of three nominees for sectoral representatives should be a woman. This policy resulted in an unprecedented and significant increase of women among the basic sectors in NAPC—8 out of 14 (57%) sectoral representatives; and 43% of sectoral council members, as compared to 33% in 2011.

The other consultative bodies still have to show some results. A cursory survey shows that in the NAFC, only 2 out of its 15 members are women; while in the NFARMC, only 1 out of its 13 members is a woman.

OTHER AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICIES

The Bottom-up Planning and Budgeting (BuB), recently renamed the Grassroots Participatory Budgeting (GPB) process is an innovation undertaken by the Aquino Administration, particularly the Human Development and Poverty Reduction Cabinet Cluster (HDPRC). It introduced some changes in the budget preparation of select national government agencies (NGAs), by "taking into consideration the development needs of cities/municipalities as identified in their respective local poverty reduction action plans (LPRAPs) that shall be formulated with strong participation of basic sector organizations and civil society organizations" (DBM-DILG-DILG-NAPC Joint Memorandum Circular [JMC] Nos. 1, 3 and 4). Under the GPB, LPRAPs are crafted by the local poverty reduction action teams (LPRATs), which shall be composed of an equal number of government and non-government representatives. Moreover, the JMCs stipulate that the **LPRATs should be composed of at least 40% women.**

More recently, the DILG issued memorandum circular no. 2013-70 regarding the accreditation of civil society organizations and selection of representatives to local special bodies (LSBs). The memo circular mandates that "membership in the LDC [Local Development Council] **must** have representatives from the women sector, or, as may be practicable, at least 40% of the fully organized council shall be composed of women pursuant to section 11 (b), R.A. 9710, known as the Magna Carta of Women."

The Civil Service Commission also spearheaded the *Career Advancement Program for Women in Government Service (CAPWINGS)* which promotes the advancement of women in government through capacity building, policy strengthening, and enhancing support mechanisms (CSC, 2015).

Government agencies, both at the national and local levels, are utilizing their 5% GAD budgets to support gender responsive programs and activities including capacity building and training for their women executives and staff. The Philippine Commission on Women also developed and accredited a gender resource pool composed of various individuals from the academe, government, and civil society organizations who can provide gender skills training for government agencies.

Strategic Objective G2: Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

CSOS WORKING FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

The number of civil society organizations (CSOs), including non-government organizations (NGOs), operating in the Philippines ranges from a conservative estimate of 15,000 to 497,000 (Yu Jose 2011). The Philippine Com-

mission on Women list has about 210 NGOs working on gender-responsive governance. Given these rough estimates, it can be said that CSOs working for gender equality and women's human rights are a drop in the bucket.

Despite this, however, the women's mass movement, collectively formed by women's groups in their different sizes and diverse forms, is considered as one of the most vibrant in the world. It is well-known that landmark laws promoting gender equality and women's human rights were passed through the lobbying strength of women's groups, despite strong resistance from conservative legislators and counter-lobby groups.

GO-NGO INITIATIVES IN EMPOWERING WOMEN IN POLITICS

There are efforts by women's groups to participate in the party list system to represent the women sector; i.e., Abanse Pinay and Gabriela. As women's parties, they are expected to ensure that women's issues and concerns are taken into consideration in the legislative agenda. They are also expected to spearhead the campaign for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Several NGOs are also in the lead towards the promotion of women's participation and representation in politics and decision-making posts. The **Center for Legislative Development (CLD)**, for instance, has a long standing advocacy campaign for gender balance in political representation. **PILIPINA** (Ang Kilusan ng Kababaihang Pilipino) is involved in organizing, mobilization and capacity-building of women leaders at the community level, for claim-making on gender budgets, policies, programs and services through constructive engagements with national and local government units. It implements a graduated leadership training and formation program called Women's Empowerment in the Barangay (WEB). There are also academe-based advocacy groups such as the **Women and Gender Institute (WAGI)** of Miriam College which provides gender and development training for government agencies and networks, specifically for the members of the Gender Focal Point System (GFPS) and their executives. It also provides transformative leadership and skills building training for young women students and leaders; and convenes intergenerational dialogues and facilitate mentorship building between eminent women in politics and the young women. More recently, PILIPINA partnered with WAGI and the *Asociacion por la Paz y Desarrollo* (PyD) to strengthen gender-responsive governance, promote women's participation and push for gender equality in the political agenda in the provinces of Agusan del Norte and Lanao del Sur.

Other women's organizations working for women's meaningful participation in political decision-making include the following: **Women Involved in Nation-Building (WIN)** which undertakes annual congresses and training on gender issues and GAD for local legislators; the **Democractic Socialist Women in the Philippines (DSWP)** which is involved in strengthening and consolidating women's organizations, focusing on young women and

women workers in the informal sector; **DAWN Foundation Inc.**, based in Negros Occidental, which provides training and technical assistance on GAD to local public officials, and also serves as the secretariat to the Provincial Council of Women of Negros Occidental (Yang & Masilungan, 2011).

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- The succession pattern of leadership in much of women's participation in politics has been traditionally dynastic. Since elections are truly expensive, most women who come forward are members of political families that allow them access to the political machinery, campaign financing, and constituencies (Manalo & Reyes, 2005).
- According to one study, "an estimated 45% of the female legislators elected to the 12th Congress were replacements of relatives previously in the House of Representatives. In the 14th Congress, 15% of congresswomen are wives of former congressmen who have just served their third and final terms" (As cited in Palatino, 2010).
- This gives a negative connotation to women officials as mere "term breakers" or "political alternates" who would keep the post to protect their families' interest.
- Women politicians are subjected to intense media scrutiny. They are judged by rigorous standards and are expected to perform better than men. At the same time, continuous portrayal of women in the media as sex objects, as weak and dependent, diminishes their chances to win elective decision-making positions.
- Even if the political arena has been gradually opened to women players, there are still not enough resources to support them. Budget constraints, as well as women's lack of access to formal education and training programs, limit the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in all spheres of political decision-making.
- Political parties are organized as a support mechanisms for male politicians; female politicians have a hard time surviving in the male-dominated environment. Most women seek allies through grassroots communities including civil society organizations or NGO advocacy groups.
- Women politicians must make a mark in politics in order to be identified and be re-elected. Most of them are trying to carry distinct issues that will prove that they are not simply political alternates/substitutes. Unfortunately, in a study conducted by Tapales (2005) on women mayors and governors in the country, it was revealed that the "project priorities of the women local chief executives are not 'gendered.' They respond to what they consider to be important needs of their constituents—infrastructure, agriculture, livelihood"; however, they also work for environmental, health, and nutrition projects.
- The Party List System was purportedly created to provide opportunity for marginalized groups including women, peasant, labor, fisherfolks, youth, urban poor, war veterans, elderly, differently abled, and indigenous communities, among others, to be represented in Congress. Under the law, 20% of the 250 seats in the House of Representatives should be allotted to the representatives of these

marginalized groups. Unfortunately, some traditional politicians or political groups are taking advantage of this system to enter the political platform by using satellite parties to run under the party list system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance capacity building and skills training for women who are already in positions of power and those aspiring to run for public office.
- Continue lobbying for gender balance in political representation and meaningful participation of women in politics and decision-making posts. Feminist leaders should be appointed in various departments specifically in the Department of Education since academic institutions should be in the forefront in changing the mindsets of the young to be more gender sensitive and gender responsive.
- Strengthen monitoring to ensure that women CSOs' participation in governance and consultative bodies are realized, in quantitative (adequate numbers are reached) and qualitative terms (voices are heard).
- Institutionalize client-focused capability-building programs and projects so that women leaders of CSOs, particularly those coming from POs, are better able to constructively engage policy- and decision-making processes.
- Set up a clearer and stronger institutional mechanism for GAD mainstreaming in government agencies and instrumentalities, as well as ensure more clarity in the accountable and responsible utilization of the GAD Budget.

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