

## 8

# Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women<sup>\*</sup>

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### ***Strategic Objectives***

- H.1. Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies;*
- H.2. Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects*
- H.3. Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation*

Equality between women and men has been one of the goals of the United Nations since its establishment after the Second World War. Over the last four decades, various UN bodies and multilateral development organizations have pursued strategic measures to eliminate various forms of discrimination against women that are rooted in age-old cultural traditions as well as in political and economic structures and processes. Women's equal right to opportunities and benefits, as well as their right to freedom from harm and abuse is now fully recognized and enshrined in international and national legal instruments (Sobritchea, 2011, p. 24).

Despite many economic and political constraints over the past decades, the Philippines has enacted enabling laws and policies as well as pursued various gender-responsive programs in accordance with the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and following the action plans of the Women's World Conferences in Nairobi (1985) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995). The country ratified CEDAW in 1981 and, in 2009, enacted the Magna Carta of Women.

In line with the goal of strengthening the institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) called on state parties to implement the aforementioned strategic objectives along the following key actions:

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- Ensure that the responsibility for the advancement of women is vested in the highest possible level of government;
- Strengthen the national machinery through clearly defined mandates and authority, and adequate resources and competence to perform policy analysis, and undertake advocacy, communication, coordination and monitoring;
- Promote active involvement of broad and diverse range of institutional actors in the public, private and voluntary sectors; and
- Ensure the collection, dissemination, dissemination and effective utilization of data disaggregated by age, sex, socioeconomic, and other categories relevant to policy advocacy and planning.

## SOME GAINS

*Strategic Objective H1: Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies for the advancement of women*

The Philippine Commission on Women, or PCW (formerly known as the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, or NCRFW), is the primary policy-making and coordinating body on women and gender equality concerns in the country. It was established on January 7, 1975 to serve as an advisory body to provide technical assistance to the President and the Cabinet on policies and programs related to the promotion of women's welfare and status.

Over the past 20 years, the Philippine government reorganized and strengthened the PCW and buttressed its efforts to pursue the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. The PCW also instituted several changes, including the shift in focus from women and development (WAD) to the gender and development (GAD) approach, and the development of strategic plans of action and tools for gender planning, mainstreaming and monitoring. A mechanism for capacity building has been established through the creation of pools and individually accredited gender trainers across the country.

The passage in 2009 of the Magna Carta of Women (MCW) expanded the mandate of PCW to go beyond its initial role as an oversight and advisory body under the Office of the President. The law strengthens its mandate to now serve as the lead provider of technical assistance on policy making and monitoring of government agencies to ensure the "promotion of women's human rights and elimination of gender-related discrimination" (Philippine Commission on Women [PCW], 2015). According to the PCW, this law is now effectively facilitating the institutionalization of its various policies and programs that account for the many positive impacts of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Gains related to strengthening the PCW stem from the following strategies: (1) enhancement of PCW's role in monitoring of programs and projects, and in building the capacity of government agencies in GAD mainstreaming; (2) policy development to enhance agency capacities in GAD planning, project implementation and monitoring; and (3) promotion of inclusive governance at the PCW and other government agencies.

## Enhancing PCW's Monitoring and Capacity Development Roles

In partnership with government units, non-government or civil society organizations (NGOs/CSOs), the academe and development organizations, the PCW has continued its effort to build the competencies of agencies in mainstreaming gender equality strategies into their respective plans and programs, as well as in the efficient and appropriate utilization of the gender budget. To respond to the increasing demand for gender trainers from various government agencies, the PCW partnered with academic institutions across the country to develop a pool of gender trainers. The latter were subsequently organized into what was called the Gender Resource Network (GRN). The network also served as a mechanism for undertaking local gender-related studies and monitoring the impact of technical assistance by various service providers from government, private sector and development organizations.

Recently, the PCW has modified this mechanism by offering a regular course for prospective and interested gender trainers and accrediting them once they pass the training program. This new mechanism aims to ensure the availability of trained and accredited resource persons. Their names and contact numbers are readily accessible in the PCW website. As of September 2014, the PCW had certified a total of 63 gender trainers. The quality and effectiveness of these "accredited" gender trainers, however, has yet to be established.

Over the years, efforts to strengthen the policy development/review and technical assistance role of PCW have reportedly been facilitated by the development of analytical tools and guidelines for GAD mainstreaming and gender-responsive project and program design, implementation and monitoring. A set of guidelines was adopted in 2004 to help promote gender equality and women's empowerment goals among locally and externally supported programs and services. Called the *Harmonized GAD Guidelines*, this consists of generic and sector-specific checklists (indicators) to ascertain the extent of gender-responsiveness of program/project design, implementation strategies, monitoring processes, and outcomes or results.<sup>1</sup> Analytical tools for identifying the forms, manifestations, causes and impacts of gender issues, and for

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<sup>1</sup> Among the sectors covered by sector-specific design checklists are: rural development (agriculture and agrarian reform, fisheries, and natural resource management), private sector development, social (such as, education and health), infrastructure, justice, and information and communication technology (ICT).

developing appropriate strategies to address these issues have likewise been disseminated to various government agencies. Among these are Gender Gap Analysis at the Community Level, Gender Mainstreaming Evaluation Framework (GMEF), Gender-Responsive LGU (Gerl Ka Ba?), and Participatory Gender Audit. Some of these were developed more than a decade ago, and might have to be revisited, and possibly revised, to improve their relevance and effectiveness.

There have also been tools that were developed and tested by women's groups and civil society organizations in recent years. Among these tools are gender responsive budgeting (GRB) tools for local governments. These are outputs of a participatory GRB action-research initiative supported by Oxfam-Great Britain. It involved the academe (Women and Gender Institute of Miriam College), two national CSOs (Social Watch Philippines and the Pambansang Koalisyon ng mga Kababaihan sa Kanayunan, or PKKK), local CSOs in Mindanao (Agri-Aqua Development Coalition [AADC], Al-Mujadilah Development Foundation [AMDF], and Rural Development Institute in Sultan Kudarat [RDI-SK]), and eight local government units in different parts of the country (Illo, 2015a).

The effectiveness of the oversight role of the national machinery can and should be assessed on the basis of the country's ability to solve the various persistent and emerging gender issues. How has the Philippine government fared in addressing these issues?

As evident in the reports on poverty and the economy, the progress made in institutionalizing the GAD approach has not been reflected in improvements in women's lives. Economic participation remains low, although there has been a narrowing in the gender gap in labor force participation by almost two percentage points. Meanwhile, average income of women-headed households among the poorest 30% is but 89% of men-headed households (PCW, 2014).

Other Beijing+20 CSO reports have identified additional issues that need to be systematically addressed in the coming years, including reduction, if not total elimination, of all forms of gender-based violence; and the need for effective interventions to respond to the risks and vulnerabilities, especially of pregnant, lactating, elderly and disabled women and girls during calamities and armed conflicts.

### **Policy Development on GAD Planning, Project Implementation and Monitoring**

Policy development to promote gender equality and the advancement of women in the Philippines has moved along three tracks: (a) issuance of administrative memorandum circulars by PCW and partner agencies across the three branches of government; (b) issuance of guidelines to enhance the capacity of agencies in gender planning; and (c) legislative review to amend

discriminatory provisions of existing laws and advocate for the passage of new ones to address persistent and emerging gender issues. All these initiatives, according to PCW, are being done in partnership with gender advocates from government and the public sector. However, feedback from various civil society organizations, particularly women's groups, indicates the failure of many agencies and local government units to regularly and systematically undertake consultations with various stakeholders. More worrisome is the claim of some groups that "even if consultations are made, their views and sentiments are not reflected in the plans or policies instituted by government units" (Sobritchea & Quesada, 2010).

The policies enacted in recent years involve the guidelines on the preparation, and more efficient submission and review of GAD plans and budgets; on the integration of gender strategies in priority programs of government; and on the development of interventions called for by the Magna Carta of Women and other gender-related laws. These policies have partly answered some of the gaps identified by a previous review of the results of the Philippine GAD budget policy, namely: (a) the need for clear budgeting guidelines, (b) lack of agreement among oversight agencies on linking the gender budget with both the organizational performance indicators framework (OPIF), which are client-focused, and organizational GAD issues, and (c) poor accountability for the GAD budget and GAD results (Illo, Encinas-Franco, Villasenor, Leyesa, & De Los Trino, 2010, pp. 204–206).

### **Inclusive Governance of PCW and other Government Agencies**

The Philippines is known worldwide for having a dynamic women's movement. The experience of martial law and political instabilities brought about by charges of corruption against national leaders have served as rallying points for organizing and advocacy by civil society groups, especially women's organizations. The Beijing Platform for Action has provided the framework for moving forward the agenda of the women's movement by ensuring that women's groups and other civil society organizations get to participate in policy making as well as program development and implementation.

The PCW pursued this track by allocating seats for representatives of civil society organizations/women's groups in its governing council. The representation of the women's sector has also been institutionalized in other national coordinating bodies such as the Commission on Indigenous Peoples and the National Anti Poverty Commission.

At the local level, many local women's councils are represented in the Municipal Development Councils, while women and children's committees have been organized in some villages, cities, municipalities and provinces. However, their effectiveness in bringing in the participation of the public has been largely dependent on political party affiliation and patronage politics,

as well as the extent of gender-responsiveness of local leaders. Nonetheless, some local women's groups and civil society organizations, such as AMDF in Lanao del Sur, have successfully drawn in women from different political factions to craft a Women's Agenda that served as the basis for a budget dialogue with the local government (Illo, 2015b). As with many efforts of government and/or civil society organization, the challenge lies in dissemination and sustainability of the model of inclusive governance.

***Strategic Objective H2: Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programs and projects***

One of the major accomplishments of the Philippines to promote gender equality was the passage of several pro-women laws and the amendment of old ones to remove their gender biases and discriminatory provisions. These laws and their implementing rules and regulations (IRR) generally incorporate the principles and appropriate actions called for by the international human rights instruments.

In 1991, the Philippines enacted the law promoting the integration of women as "full and equal partners of men in development and nation building" (Republic Act 7192). This groundbreaking piece of legislation recognizes the human rights of women as embodied in international instruments and the country's Constitution. It contains provisions to enhance gender equality in resources and decision-making, and requires that a substantial portion of foreign assistance funds be allocated to support programs for women.

To ensure the integration of gender-equality principles in government policies, structures and programs, the Philippine Congress included a provision in the annual government budget law (known as Government Appropriations Act) that requires all public offices to allocate 5% of their budget appropriation for gender-related initiatives. This practice began in 1995 and continues to this day. Its implementation was facilitated by the issuance of a series of joint circulars by the PCW and relevant oversight agencies (such as the budget and planning departments) between 1994 and 2013, all of which requires the preparation of a GAD plan on which would be based the GAD budget (Illo et al., 2010, p. 4).

In addition to laws that aim to protect women in the workplace and to provide access to credit for informal-sector women workers to engage in micro and cottage industries, laws were passed to protect women from discrimination and abuse, including those that expand the definition of rape and increase the penalty of offenders. Two laws are notable in this regard: the Anti-Violence against Women and Their Children Act, which declares abuse of women in intimate relations as a crime, and Anti-trafficking in Persons Act (originally passed in 2003, and expanded in 2012), which provides



a comprehensive definition of trafficking in relation to prostitution, pornography, sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery, involuntary servitude or debt bondage, and establishes the penalty for those found guilty of the crime.

***Strategic Objective H3: Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation***

Over the past decades, the Philippine government has striven to generate and disseminate sex-disaggregated data for use in the development of gender-responsive policies, programs and services. These data have been made more easily available to various users online through agency-based websites. The website of the Philippine Commission on Women provides up-to-date sex-disaggregated data. Moreover, an “online Gender Mainstreaming Monitoring System (GMMS) is currently being pilot-tested by PCW to facilitate the submission and monitoring of gender plans and accomplishment reports with their corresponding planning data” (PCW 2015: 29).

At the agency level, however, data may still not be sex disaggregated beyond the distribution of personnel by sex, and information on gender-related constraints to access or participation may not be available at all. These continue to hamper the preparation of GAD plans and the design of programs, projects and services that address key gender-based issues that women and men, girls and boys face.

## REMAINING CHALLENGES

As evident in the analysis of the reported gains, these are fraught with some challenges. Unless these are resolved and systematically addressed in the coming years, the desired outcomes may not be fully achieved.

Feedback from various sectors, especially from local women’s organizations and from members of academe who have been mobilized to do the gender training activities since the early ’90s, shows the need for continuous capacity building of various government agencies in gender planning and gender budgeting. One of the reasons cited for the failure of some government agencies to prepare and effectively implement their gender plans is the absence of personnel who can do the task on a fulltime and regular basis. Participation in GAD committee work often conflicts with the regular assignments of government personnel. The other reason cited is the need for more intensive training in identifying agency-specific gender issues, through use of sex disaggregated data and in developing effective actions to address such issues. Many agencies have yet to fulfill their obligation to generate sex-disaggregated data.

The continuing challenge will be: Who will provide the array of technical assistance or training to government agencies and local government units? Accreditation of gender trainers may be a step, but this should come after rigid training and quality vetting, and monitoring and evaluation of actual conduct of technical assistance and/or training.

The participation of civil society organizations is critical in ensuring the adequacy of plans and efficient utilization of the GAD budget. Yet, this mechanism has yet to be fully utilized. Women's groups from some cities and provinces claim that they have not been called upon to share their knowledge and insights on the issues faced by women in their communities. However, women's groups themselves may also need to be trained in gender-responsive budgeting to better engage local governments.

There is a need to revisit and perhaps revise the gender mainstreaming tools and guidelines to harmonize with the shift from GAD to human rights-based GAD. This means the inclusion of accountability indicators based on the provisions of all the gender-related laws that are relevant or appropriate to agencies.

One of the difficulties faced by many government agencies is the generation of sex-disaggregated data and their use for planning and policy development. Technical support may not only be through skills enhancement in gender mainstreaming, but also coaching in analyzing the gender issues—their causes and effects, across various development areas. The expertise of economists, social scientists, geologists, etc., in partnership with the GAD Committees, can speed up the generation and application of relevant and appropriate sex-disaggregated data and gender information.

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