

Exploring Political Participation and Leadership Approach of Women Political Leaders in Mindanao

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ABSTRACT

Increasing the number of women occupying political posts in the country is a key focus of Republic Act (RA) No. 9710, the Magna Carta of Women. While there has been a steady numeric improvement (Tancangco, 1990), studies on entry points of women politicians into the political arena and the type of leadership approach that they cultivate remains wanting of attention. District II of Zamboanga del Norte is selected as the study site, given that the area from 2016 to 2018 hosted a significant number of women political leaders: three Vice-Mayors, two Mayors, and a member of the House of Representatives. Such number is not present in other parts of Mindanao. Guided by the qualitative narrative approach (Creswell, 2014), the stories of the key informants were gathered through semi-structured interviews on-site and then validated after the informants read, clarified, and discussed their narratives further. Aided by Agarwal's (2001) political participation and Batliwala's (2010) feminist leadership, the unfolding meaning of the generated data suggests that the brand of political leadership

among women politicians in District II of Zamboanga del Norte has the following intersecting concerns: searching for political identities, addressing the practical needs of their constituents, concretizing one or two landmark projects within their political terms, and reflecting on some constraints to their aspirations for higher political office.

Keywords: leadership, political participation, women politicians, Zamboanga del Norte, Mindanao

INTRODUCTION

The situation of women politicians occupying political posts in Mindanao remains an under-researched topic. While the number of women politicians in Mindanao is included in sex-disaggregated statistical representation of politicians in the country, a specific look at the Mindanao context remains wanting of research and discursive attention. This lack explains the need to know their situation, the possible constraints to political participation, and the meanings of their experiences as they perform their tasks and duties while serving their communities as elected government officials. In Mindanao, for instance, a study shows that women grew in power from 11.5% to 28.8% in the last 25 years (*MindaNews*, 2013). This statistical improvement, however, is also reassessed, given that many of these officials entered the political scene as wives, daughters, sisters, or widows of elected male officials (Tancangco, 2001). Is the traditional entry point to politics, such as being part of political families or having the support of dominant political groups, applicable to women politicians in District II, Zamboanga del Norte? Do their stories suggest or represent emerging styles of political leadership? These critical questions can only be properly dealt with once the stories of these women politicians have been articulated and analyzed.

Upholding the exploratory nature of qualitative research (Creswell, 2011), this project primarily aims to describe how women politicians in District II, Zamboanga del Norte become elected into government posts and to inquire if there are distinguishing marks in their brands or styles

of leadership. These objectives are looked into to help describe the nature of political participation and leadership approaches as they fulfill their roles as politicians in Mindanao. Guided by such interest, this research tackles the following concerns: (1) Stories on running for a political office, issues in vying for such posts, and the way these issues were/are being addressed; (2) Challenges or constraints related to one's functions, issues specific to women, and how such issues are addressed; (3) Experiences in working with male counterparts, partners, and constituents; and (4) Reflections on leadership style. These aims are embedded within the primary objective of the study, which is to investigate if there are emerging brands of leadership that question traditional political routes or patriarchy.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Participation of women in political leadership is important in effective development and governance. As inclusive development values people's participation, women's participation is an opportunity to contribute to processes of decision-making (Agarwal, 2001). Placing a premium on empowering participation, White (1996) underscores the need for women to maximize their contribution in influencing political decisions. Kabeer (1999) specifies that women in politics should participate in discussions concerning access to resources, contexts of choices, elements necessary to reach goals, and assessing achievements.

In South and Southeast Asia, Richter (1990-1991) puts forward certain variables that somehow predisposed and ushered women into power and political positions in the region. In studying high placed and elected female political leaders in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Burma, and Bangladesh, her study accounts patriarchy, familial ties, martyrdom, social class, female lifestyles, the independence movements, and prison experiences as key facilitating factors for their emergence to top political positions. She further notes that such routes to power are similar to some male political leaders but underscored that men politicians seem to have wider access and options to such routes.

In the Philippines, Aguilar (1990) and Tancangco (1990) identified women's political participation in the areas of voting, campaigning,

running for elective post, Cabinet appointment, and involvement in the women's movement. Although the number of women running for and winning elective posts has increased in the past decade, analysis shows that these women come from dynastic families and serve as "breakers, to mean breaking their husband's, father's, or brother's term of office" (Tapales, 2002, as cited in Sobritchea, 2019) or "benchwarmers" (Folke & Rickne, 2016) in order to preserve the family's hold on political positions.

Aside from the reality of women benchwarmers, overcoming barriers to attaining higher and more strategic political posts is another concern. The male-centric nature of the country's politics makes it difficult for women politicians to win higher and more strategic political positions. This difficulty, according to Sobritchea (2019), can be attributed to cultural, political, and economic factors that constrain women from participating. This particular difficulty is likened to a "glass ceiling" or the "unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minority and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder" despite their high qualifications (U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). The concept of the glass ceiling points to barriers such as socio-cultural habits and expectations that make it difficult for women to advance and occupy higher organizational positions. Another barrier is the concept of "sticky floors" where disadvantages are more severe at the lower levels or entry points (Folke & Rickne, 2016), such as being treated as the last option, hence, least in priority when a family or party list decides who will run for a political position. Women intending to enter politics need to hurdle tougher pathways than their male counterparts. Once they win a seat, the victory is coupled with hope that they have contributed in the struggle to break or shatter the glass ceiling or have risen from the constraints of sticky floors.

Shvedova (2005) adds to the discussion by further categorizing what women deal with to break the glass-ceiling: political/institutional, socio-economic, and ideological and psychological (or socio-cultural). Political/institutional barriers include a masculine model of politics, lack of support from relevant institutions, lack of cooperation with women organizations, lack of access to well-developed education and training systems for women's leadership, and an electoral system whose conditions are not favorable

to women candidates. The socio-economic constraints are: the feminization of poverty and lack of resources, limited access to education and choice of profession, and the dual burden of domestic tasks and professions. The ideological and psychological impediments refer to gender ideology, cultural patterns and predetermined social roles, women's lack of confidence, women's perception of politics as dirty, and representations of women in mass media that perpetuate gender biases and stereotypes.

Similar constraints were identified by Sobritchea (2019) and Santos-Maranan, Parreño, and Fabros (2007) and could explain the hindrances to women's full and meaningful political participation, as well as persistent sexist beliefs and practices in private and public spheres and a male-centered, macho political culture that holds male leaders as key decision-makers in political dynasties and political parties. The increase in the number of women politicians also does not automatically mean that female politicians are gender sensitive or that the increase in female representation in public leadership promotes women's concerns. Meaningful political participation underscores the need to have women leaders who support pro-women policies and programs and the offer of support to potential and incumbent female leaders from political parties and the female electorate.

The other constraints to full and meaningful political participation are socio-economic in nature. This pertains to costs in running for public office and establishing a wide network and significant connections and child and family care, which is still regarded as the women's primary tasks in their households. Such constraints may also be explained by more ideological-psychological expectations that women in politics contend with, such as stereotypes that consider women as being too emotional, indecisive, or physically weak to hold responsible government positions; as being incompetent; only fit for duties that are based on gender stereotypes; and as lacking the skills and motivation to take on leadership roles. There is also the disdain for participatory and consultative leadership, as in the style of President Corazon Aquino, which was viewed as a sign of weakness or "feminine" incompetence. When male leaders adopted this same leadership style, however, they were praised for their sensitivity to democratic principles.

For women's political participation and the relevant leadership theories, two perspectives may shed light on their situation. Transactional Leadership theory suggests that the transactional leader creates and upholds clear structures to determine what is required and the expected reward for subordinates for following orders (Bass & Bass, 2009). Transformational Leadership theory, on the other hand, involves "a process where leaders and followers engage in a mutual process of raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation" (Burns, 1978). Expounding further, "the transformational leader asks followers to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group, organization, or society; to consider their long-term need for self-development rather than their need of the moment; and to become more aware of what is really important. Hence, followers are converted into leaders" (Bass & Bass, 2009).

Between these two types of leadership, transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership (Bass, 1996). This is because transformational leadership cannot be driven solely by the leader's charisma. It entails a behavioral process guided by systematic implementation of actions based on principles of equality and equity (Tichy & Devana, 1986, as cited in Bass & Bass, 2009). An example of transformative leadership is feminist leadership motivated by equity, and it therefore advocates for social justice and hopes to end all forms of oppression, such as gender-based marginalization (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016). Batliwala (2010) offers a definition of a feminist leader: "Women with a feminist perspective and vision of social justice, individually and collectively transforming themselves to use their power, resources, and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilize others—especially other women—around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic, and political transformation for equality and the realization of human rights for all."

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Participation in politics speaks of a platform where contribution, involvement, and even a shared sense of responsibility intersect. This explains why participation is crucial in any development and governance

discourse. People's participation is considered fundamental in inclusive and shared development, which underscores the necessity to provide ways or mechanisms where people can contribute in decision-making processes (Agarwal, 2001). Following such principles of participation, Agarwal (2001) itemized participation as either one or a combination of these types: (1) nominal participation, (2) passive participation, (3) consultative participation, (4) activity-specific participation, (5) active participation, and (6) interactive or empowering participation. Guided by this list, this paper makes use of the contrast between passive participation, which is limited to attendance and listening in decision-making without speaking up, and interactive or empowering participation, which is characterized by "having a voice and influence in the group's decision" (Agarwal, 2001). Agarwal's (2001) classification and discussion on participation will be used to describe the manner by which the women elected leaders fulfill their roles, and the way they dialogue with the issues/concerns that their constituents deal with.

Such perspective is coupled with the perspective of Feminist-Transformative Leadership explored by Batliwala (2010). This position makes clear the need to be guided by these general goals: to challenge the types of power that reinforce women's subordination and discrimination and to create alternative forms of power to make the exercise of power visible and accountable. With such ends, the manner and ways by which the elected women politicians use the power that is inherent in their post will be investigated. With such notion of power within the feminist-transformative leadership frame, specific leadership characteristics with regard to process and practice are described and critically explored. This is the analytical capacity that Batliwala's (2010) perspective lends to this study as the accounts of the interviewed women politicians are analyzed. Batliwala's (2010) standpoint will help determine the distinction and relation between feminine leadership and feminist transformative leadership.

Both theoretical frames are selected, since they reinforce and validate each other's claims. For instance, Agarwal's (2001) stance on the empowered type of political participation can be cross checked by Batliwala's (2010) interpretation of feminist-transformative leadership

as indicative of its capacity to question and challenge structures that condition women's marginalization. In the same way, Batliwala's (2010) expectation of alternative forms of power is an important component in Agarwal's (2001) demand for interactive forms of participation between public officials and the people. Guided by both perspectives, Batliwala's (2010) discussion on power and Agarwal's (2001) understanding of participation are taken to be complementary or synergistic terms.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses the general features of the qualitative narrative approach of Creswell (2011) and adds nuance by employing the life-history perspective of Cole and Knowles (2001). To ensure sensitivity to the context of the narratives, the data-gathering and key informant interviews were done on-site. Observations on how the informants deal with their constituents were also documented and considered. In collating the data gathered, transcripts of the interviews were produced, and the emerging intersectional or cross-sectional themes from the narratives were itemized. These themes sequentially served as objects of interest in the second methodological concern of this project—the analytic and discursive part.

The analytical and discursive part uses the lens of Agarwal (2001) to discuss the nature of political participation of the selected women leaders. The transformative leadership of Batliwala (2010) is used to describe the kind of leadership that they both practice and cultivate. In the course of the analysis, the struggles that these leaders deal with in relation to vying for political posts will meet the glass ceiling phenomenon as explained by Shvedova (2005). Hence, this study will involve two types of validation: (a) practical/material given the plurality of methods in data gathering and (b) conceptual, since the three theoretical perspectives will help check and corroborate the relationship between political participation and leadership style. This means that a woman politician cannot have a transformative brand of leadership, using Batliwala's (2010) perspective, if the nature of her political participation is not substantive and participatory as conceived by Agarwal (2001).

NARRATIVES

Cong. Glo. “*Gusto ko na magkaroon ng landmark project sa PWD.*” (“I intend to make a landmark project for the PWD—People with Disabilities.”) Aside from completing the barangay halls and multipurpose gyms in her district, Glo has set her eyes on coming up with a project for PWD. This is aligned with her interest in improving the health services in her district, as she also hopes to work well with the province on the same agenda. Glo mentions two specific plans: upgrading the facilities of the provincial hospital and creating classrooms for the PWD students with the corresponding training of the teachers. It is important to note here that Glo’s interest in creating inclusive spaces for PWD students is a project close to her heart, since one of her daughters also has special needs and is currently part of the special education (SPED) program of the Department of Education (DepEd). These plans are part of Glo’s priority projects as she contemplates running for another term in Congress.

Since Glo’s first term as a Representative is about to end, she has some insights with regard to her leadership style and her efforts to make a dent in the lives of her constituents in District II. “At least *ako, nakakausap ko sila na parang family ko lang sila. Gusto ko yun eh, nalalapitan nila ako.*” (“I can talk to the people like family. I am happy with such style, since the people can approach me.”) When asked why she thinks she behaves in such a manner, Glo opines that it may have to do with her being a mother. Glo stresses that her approachable personality encourages people to come and talk to her about their needs and concerns in spite of her lack of facility in using the local language. While Glo admits that she initially consulted her husband when making decisions, she now finds fulfillment in discovering her capacity to decide on her own, which does not necessarily always get her husband’s approval. “At first, *ano talaga ako*, fully guided *talaga ako ni Ros*, but as I go along, *ngayon ‘di na. Kung бага*, I can do it on my own...*Sabi nya*, you have to learn even without me *para di nila isipin na parang ako pa rin.*” (“At first, I was fully guided by Ros [her husband], but as I went along, I could do it on my own...He pointed out that I have to learn to be on my own, so they won’t think that he is still the one making the decisions.”)

As part of her reflections on her position, Glo also remarks on the role of the government in people's lives. She recalls visiting the far-flung areas of her district and seeing how some communities have remained isolated and unreachable by government assistance. "*Hanggang doon sa—ano—sa kabukiran sana makarating ba, maramdaman nila na may gobyerno. Kasi pag andon ka parang talagang wala eh. Parang they are on their own.*" ("In the remotest areas, they cannot feel the presence of the government. It is as if they are living on their own.") It is this encounter with the conditions of the poorest members of the district that helped Glo decide to run for the position and extend whatever help she can, so the people will feel the presence of the government, even if only in the local district. Remaining in the country (her husband used to work in the USA, and she was based in Hong Kong as an international flight attendant) as public servants also helped Glo's family, as it brought them closer together. Glo thinks that it was their desire to help others that sealed their decision to go back to the country for good. In Glo's mind, the decision also meant living closer to her children.

Working abroad for years while overseeing the care of her children in the Philippines has also trained her in managing the concerns of her district off-site while she is in Manila to attend sessions in the House of Representatives. The experience of fulfilling her task remotely as a mother was mediated through the use of technology. As a public servant, she discovered innovative ways to check the status of projects implemented in her district, as well as her constituents' situation through technology. As an example, she requires select barangay representatives to send her pictures, so she can monitor the progress of projects or see the problems/constraints with regard to their implementation. For Glo, such a strategy is part of a consultative process, as she tries to maintain contact with her constituents and monitor or discipline the people she has assigned to oversee projects in their areas/communities.

The arrangement also helped Glo answer her children's questions on running for a political post and if it was really worth undertaking. Noting that the family had already served the district during her husband's term, Glo realized then that she could do more projects and programs or continue the programs that her husband had started. Glo believes

that the fulfillment or satisfaction that one gets when causing positive impact on the lives of the people allowed her to confidently address the concerns of her children. Recalling their questions, “Do you really have to do that? *‘Yan talaga ang* question, do you really have to do that? *Ayon, parang yung sa akin din nong sinasabi sa husband ko na pwede naman tayong tumulong kahit papano.*” (“Do you really have to do that? That was the question of my children. My husband also reminded me that we can somehow still help others even outside of politics.”)

What made you decide to continue to serve for another term? To this question, Glo responds: “*Kasi alam ko naman na deep in my heart na I’m giving my best. Yung fulfilment ko na alam ko na I work [for] every single centavo that I earn—na sinisweldo sa akin—parang ganoon yung feeling ko, and I want to continue.*” (“I know deep in my heart that I am giving my best, and I find fulfillment in knowing that I worked hard for every centavo that I earned from my salary. It is because of such sense of fulfillment that I want to continue serving my district.”) This sense of fulfillment is also shown by Glo’s realization of her growing confidence in dealing with other politicians and persons occupying crucial positions. For instance, Glo remarks that she makes an effort to visit the offices of secretaries, heads of departments, or agencies just to solicit support for her projects. She does not waver and does not mind going the extra mile, as long as she can get some form of help for projects. As Glo explains, “*Dati kasi, ako, mahiya akong lumapit. Pero ngayon I learned to talk to secretaries and make appointment with them kahit sino ‘yang nandyan.*” (“Before, I used to shy away from conversations with the secretaries, but that has changed. Today, I try my best to get as many appointments with whoever is available.”) Glo realized then that she needed to change, since she will only have herself to blame if the funds coming in for projects in her district are inadequate.

Will Glo succeed in bringing development to her district? To answer this question, Glo tells us that she already made a list of priority projects. She reiterates the need to improve the provincial hospital, which means working closely with the Department of Health (DOH), to continue constructing barangay halls in all barangays, and to improve the state of education by adding classrooms. She is looking forward to more projects

after undergoing training to be provided by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), and other government agencies for her existing and upcoming projects.

Dr. VM. Doc entered politics at the age of 52. She first ran for the Sangguniang Bayan (SB) post in 2004—a position she also won in 2007. She then ran as Vice-Mayor (VM) of their municipality in 2010 and won and served for two more terms afterwards. At the time of this interview, which was before the 2019 elections, Doc was already thinking of running again as SB member at the encouragement of her party list. Doc specifies that the party list considers her the most senior legislator in the municipality, and she attributes this to the various committees that she has worked in, e.g., committee on laws and health. If Doc wins in the election and serves full term, she will have been serving their municipality for a total of 18 years.

Doc stands out in their municipality, as she is the only politician who is also a practicing medical doctor. At the age of 24 (in 1975), Doc VM attained a medical degree, took and passed the board exam the following year, and got her license as a medical doctor. She then worked as junior resident in a District Hospital before joining the rural health program of the municipality. As a medical doctor, Doc VM dreamed of establishing a primary hospital, which became a reality from 1980 to 2000. After the nurses of the hospital migrated overseas or transferred to government hospitals, the primary hospital regressed into an out-patient hospital. “*Wala na ang mga nurses, nag-abroad na tanan, ang uban nag-work na sa government.*” (“All of the nurses went abroad or transferred to government hospitals.”) This change in the status of the hospital freed her from responsibilities, which somehow allowed her to seriously consider running for office.

Doc contributes to the community while serving both as public servant and medical doctor. Aside from the ordinances on health and sanitation, Doc VM also provides free consultation to people in their municipality. This is her regular contribution. In her clinic, free consultation can be availed by showing a bookmark to Doc VM’s staff,

so one becomes exempt from paying the clinic's consultation fee. Doc VM explains that the bookmarks also function as electoral paraphernalia and that those we saw at her office were surpluses from the previous election. Asked if every person got a bookmark, Doc VM clarifies that every family/household receives one bookmark. She explains further, "It is also transferrable. *Kung walay bookmark, mangayo lang sa clinic.*" ("If one does not have a bookmark, it can be easily obtained in the clinic.") On reflection, Doc VM says, aside from gaining the people's trust, another contribution of her bookmarks is they encourage people to seek early consultation when experiencing health issues.

One limitation, she admits, of her bookmarks is that it can only be used by people in their municipality. Doc, however, stresses that she only asks for PhP250 as consultation fee for patients from other municipalities: "My consultation fee is not like other doctors. Physicians charge from PhP300 to 500 *ang sa kanila*. I even started at PhP10 per consultation during my first few years of practice." ("My consultation fee is different from other doctors, since physicians usually charge PhP300 to 500. In my first few years of practice, I only asked for PhP10 per consultation.") It should be noted that, as there is no limit to the number of consultations a person or family can avail of as long as one has the bookmark, this arrangement implies that Doc VM almost always gives free consultations.

Doc VM cites health as her primary concern, and it was actually the main reason she ran for the SB and VM positions, since such posts allow her to practice her medical profession. She notes that, "*Kay kung mayor, dili allowed.*" ("If you are the Mayor, then you are not allowed to practice your profession.") Practicing the profession also means having a steady source of income. "Financial *pud,*" Doc VM adds. It is also because of said profession that she extends her services to anyone, even in locations outside of the clinic. She recounts, "*Oo, kahit saan, consultation. Magpapirma, medical certificate, oo. Kung pasyente ko, kung wala ako ayo magdala sila ng medical certificate pirmahan ko. Wala akong pili ng lugar.*" ("Yes, I do free consultation at any place. I also sign medical certificates outside of the clinic. I don't refuse anyone based on where we are at that time.") This sense of flexibility is appreciated by Doc VM in her work, both as a medical doctor and as a politician.

With regard to projects, she laments that there is no substantial program on health in their municipality. Doc VM, however, clarifies that they are still finalizing projects on health, such as the drug rehabilitation center. She also shares the forthcoming ordinance on ecological solid waste management and garbage disposal to address the substantial problems in their municipality. Of interest is Doc VM's observation of what happens when politics intervenes with government agencies/units on health. She cites an example where the Municipal Health Officer (MHO) was not allowed to make decisions or served simply as the mouthpiece of a politician. Doc VM insists that the MHO should be empowered and not the politicians. In her words, "*I-empower natin yung municipal health officer, not the politicians.*" ("We should empower the health officer, not the politicians.") Remaining forward-looking, Doc VM is excited to implement more aggressive health programs, especially on dengue, cleanliness, clean-up drives, and even penalties or citations for violating policies. Doc VM is convinced that health facilities and programs in the municipality will fail if the MHO and other agencies or institutions are not given the autonomy to make decisions.

In rolling out her duties, Doc VM also describes how she values every centavo of the government's budget. Noting simple temptations in using government supplies and facilities, she is very strict in ensuring that she does not use government-purchased items for personal use. This rule is put to good use during elections when she reiterates to her staff that they should never use any item, such as paper or pens, for electoral campaigns. This is a trait that Doc VM also considers as part of her legacy to her staff now that she considers the 2019 election as the last election where she will run. Doc VM has such scruples in using money, since she herself was able to save money out of diligence. It was through hard work that she was able to build a primary hospital, and now, she continues to operate an out-patient clinic in their municipality.

Will Doc VM still give bookmarks to her constituents once she ends her term in politics? To this question, she expresses her willingness to do the same, just so she can continue to serve the people in their municipality. At the age of 68, Doc VM is the oldest politician in their municipality.

How did she thrive and survive in the world of politics? Doc VM gives a simple reply: "Always read committee reports."

VM Alberto. As the first elected woman Barangay Kagawad in Barangay Poblacion in the municipality of Roxas, VM Alberto takes pride in her accomplishment in making history. At 57, VM Alberto recalls how she was considered and invited by their Barangay Captain as the last addition to the barangay slate. She did not hesitate and immediately filed her candidacy the day before the deadline. The rest is history. She has now served the municipality of Roxas for 15 years, first as a Barangay Kagawad, then as a Municipal Councilor, and she is now the Vice-Mayor of the municipality. When asked what made her decide to run for public office, VM shares that she used to frequently utter this prayer: “Lord, *bigyan mo nga ako ng way na parang nag-office ako na maka serve ako sa tao.*” (“Lord, please provide me with work where I can also serve the people.”) The desire to do public service made it easy for VM to say yes to the invitation to run and continue working in politics.

The desire to help others has been present even before she joined politics. VM recounted her neighbors’ plea to help them bring their mother to the hospital after suffering from high blood pressure. Given the distance of the nearest health care facility (18 kilometers away from Roxas), VM facilitated the transport of their neighbor to the hospital. The family never forgot what she did for them. In another instance, VM once again showed her desire to be of assistance to those needing help during a death in another neighbor’s household. Her neighbor had only PhP140 with them at that difficult time. She negotiated with the owner of a funeral home, so that they could assist the family even if the family could not provide down payment. When asked why she was always ready to extend assistance to her neighbors and how it figured in her running for public office, VM Alberto says, “*Basta ano na lang ang maabot ko na maitulong ko sa iba ibang pamaraan. Yun, tapos nung sumali na ako sa barangay, di nanalo ako hindi ko ini-expect yun naging number one ako.*” (“I just help when I can. When I ran for a barangay position, I did not expect that I will be number one.”) VM also adds, “*Ako lang ang babae doon sa barangay. Parang sa barangay parang ako ang unang babae na napili doon, oo. Kasi karamihan male ang politician dito.*” (“I was the only woman politician in the barangay, and the first woman elected official given that almost all politicians in the area are

men.”) Public service gave her the opportunity to fulfill her desire to serve and, at the same time, make her mark in their community as the first woman elected official in the community.

Aside from being the first female Barangay Kagawad, VM is also the first woman councilor in the municipality. She shared, “So, *yon* 2004, *ako na* number one *rin ako na konsehal*, the first elected woman councilor after 36 years. *Oo, bali 36 years na ang* municipality ng Roxas *oo*, first woman elected councilor.” (“In 2004, I was the number one councilor and the first woman to be so in the 36 years since Roxas was recognized as a municipality.”) VM recognizes that having been elected as the first woman councilor contributed to other women also running for political positions. VM observes that before, women were hesitant to run or compete with men. “*O, dito sa akin nag-umpisa na yung mga kabaranggayan meron nang tumakbo na babae. Dahil nong araw talagang, oo, lalake lang ang mga nanalo.*” (“Yes, it started with me, and other women in the barangay were inspired to run for government posts. Prior to my election win, women were hesitant to vie for a position as only men would win.”) VM also takes pride in the fact that she competed with known and established men. She mentions male politicians who were retired supervisors, retired principals, and known influential politicians. She also shares that a female doctor became Mayor, who was also the wife of the former mayor. VM, in contrast, does not come from a politically established clan. In fact, she is the first politician in the family.

VM recognizes the responsibility and the need to come up with solutions by herself, without the help of powerful family or relatives. As she puts it, “*Maulaw pud baya ka muadto kay Mayor. Mangita jud ka ug paagi unsaon nimo na pagtabang ma'am kay o para nako malooy ko ma'am mulakaw ang tao wala koy makadalit nga tabang.*” (“I feel uncomfortable in seeking the help of our Mayor. As much as possible, I will look for ways to solve the problems of my constituents, and I also am embarrassed if I could not extend any form of help or assistance.”) To VM, it is this trait of being self-sufficient that helped her win in the previous election. Noting that she ran against two formidable opponents—one was a lawyer and the other the wife of a well-to-do British consultant—VM was confident that the people in their municipality were looking for a candidate

who had a good track record. VM is convinced that it is her ability to give assistance to anybody needing help during her term that made her win against the two candidates.

Aside from social assistance, VM also values education. Her daughter is pursuing a medical degree, and her son is completing his degree in Business Administration. VM is proud to have initiated a dialogue with the Rizal College State University president, so the college can offer other courses apart from Education in the Jose Rizal Memorial State University (JRMSU) in Katipunan, the town next to Roxas. An agreement has been reached to offer other courses such as Criminology, Business Administration, Hotel and Restaurant Management, among others. This agreement means that students in their municipality will have more options in the pursuit of their college degrees.

Apart from education, VM also recounts the projects she initiated in addressing health issues. She specifies projects that she had with the College of Medicine of UP Manila to address the mental health issues in the municipality. She shares a specific case on how addressing mental health issues can contribute to their constituents' development: Boboy, a resident of Barangay Denuman, Roxas, who was found aimlessly walking on his own was employed by VM and given simple tasks like chopping wood and cutting grass in exchange for food and a modest salary. This made Boboy regain his sense of self. Boboy eventually decided to go home, and he promised VM that he would continue to be productive and to take care of himself. It is because of such interventions that VM was praised by the Mayor and their constituents. VM recounts, "*Niingon man kuno si Mayor nga. Well-rounded Vice Mayor man na si Vice. Iya pung giingnan mga teachers. Swerte mo kay inyong mga municipal officials, kamao mu-serbisyo, mga antigo sila.*" ("Mayor said that VM is well-rounded. The teachers also commented that the municipality is lucky to have service-oriented officials who also know what they are doing.")

VM plans to run as municipal councilor in the next elections. Running for Mayor has also crossed her mind, but she has decided to delay this for the current Mayor to complete his three terms. She also shares that running for the chief executive position in their municipality entails a large sum of capital, which she does not have at the moment

because she is sending her daughter to medical school. She is confident that she can do the job, but her daughter's education is the priority. This does not mean that she ceases to be a public servant, however. As VM holds, "*Dili problema bisan konsehal ko, I will still do my function. Ako baya nang pangitaon. Mao nang makaingon jud ko nga passion jud kaayo nang serbisyo.*" ("It is not a problem for, as a councilor, I can still help my constituents, especially the people who will still seek my help or service. My constituents know that I am capable of extending aid, and that helping is my passion.") VM adds, "*Magkonsehal ko. (I will run as municipal councilor.) I will sacrifice for the sake of the good.*"

In describing her brand of leadership, these words of VM somehow capture the very spirit of her style of public service: "*Maghatag gyud mi. Bisag unsa nalang nga assistance.*" ("We try to extend any form of assistance, just so we can help.") She is seen by her constituents as someone who can solve their problems. As vice-mayor and head of the local council, she has also learned to manage conflicts. At one point, she had to put the session on recess four times, so the councilors (from different political parties) could settle down and re-think their positions. VM recalls that she had to find ways to keep the peace in the council to be able to properly discuss issues and concerns of the municipality. Her strategy also mirrors how she addresses conflicts and solves disagreements. As described, "*Oo, recess hanggang matapos yung session. Pero never na iniwanan ko. Kasi na-experience ko yung konsehal ako, na minsan may mga issue na hot talaga. Hinaharap ko talaga yung kung ano yung problema kasi andyan na eh. Basta nag-follow ka lang sa rule.*" ("Yes, I decided to go on recess, but I have never left a session due to heated debates. I deal with the problem, since it is already there, and as long as rules are followed.") VM proudly recalls how she was able to survive such tests. In instances when she had to break the tie in the local council, she admits that it was a challenge to set aside politics and vote for what is right. This has been her approach, and she stands her ground even if it means going against the stance of councilors who are from the same political party. For VM, as long as she sides with what she believes is right, and she has given each councilor a chance to raise his/her position, then she has done her job to uphold the ideals and processes of democracy in decision-making.

As a former Population Commission (POPCOM) employee, she advocates for family planning, although prefers the natural method herself. She, however, respects those who have chosen to access the modern methods of family planning, as this is more effective, and she has seen how difficult it is for women to raise a family. She also believes that divorce is only the last resort for those who are victims of abuses. VM recounts how her position evolved from being against divorce to a conditional yes, after she has assisted victims of violence against women and children (VAWC). Lastly, she believes that lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender individuals (LGBTs) should have the same rights as men and women in the workplace, in schools, and in health care delivery.

VM Daisy. Coming from a family of politicians, VM ran for the position of Barangay Captain and won the post in 1994. This feat came after the first one, when she graduated from the Western Mindanao State University Zamboanga City. At 22, she had hesitations about running for office, since entering the world of politics meant being subjected to public scrutiny. The primary reason she overcame her fear of the public eye was having a college degree. As she notes, “*Gamay ra ang nay college degree sa amuang barangay. Kadtung nagsugod ko, ako ra ang nay diploma sa mga barangay officials.*” (“There is only a handful of college degree holders in our barangay. When I assumed the position, I was the only barangay official who had a college diploma.”) Realizing that there were only a few college graduates in their barangay, she believed that she also had the capacity to be a leader in their community.

VM Daisy first served as a barangay official. Noting the poor conditions of their place—the absence of concrete roads, the lack in means of transportation as their only way to the municipality center was by a small boat—VM Daisy facilitated key projects that included road construction connecting the barangay to the highway and an annex to the nearest National High School in their barangay. She served the community for 13 years—from 1994 to 2007. Serving in a remote area, VM Daisy understood the importance of making education accessible to the people. In her narrative, VM recalls and summarizes the gradual flow of progress in their area. She describes how the school started,

specifically when the barangay hall was used as an alternative classroom while the school classrooms were being constructed; when they had only one teacher until government items were allocated thus allowing for additional teachers; and when they had four teachers assigned to handle each of the four year levels in high school education. VM stresses, “*Usa na sa akoang gipangusgan nga advocacy, education. Tungod lagi sa kalayo sa lugar layo jud 18 kilometers away from the next municipality. Wala pay dalan nga ensakto.*” (“One of my key advocacies is education, since our barangay is 18 kilometers from the next municipality. The roads were still problematic and difficult.”)

Today, VM proudly notes that they already have a National High School. The presence of this school means that she will no longer see kids traveling long distances by foot just to study and earn a high school diploma. She adds that the five neighboring barangays are also able to benefit from the presence of the school. Sharing that her parents were unable to finish their college degrees, VM is hoping that one day, all of her constituents in the barangay will have at least finished secondary education. As VM specifies, “*Ako man gud sauna, layo ko ug skwelahan, baklay, layo. Sakit sa akoang kasing-kasing nga dili mi makaeskwela kaya ng akong parents actually wala sila nahuman.*” (“I also experienced studying in schools where I had to walk long distances to get there. The thought of not completing my studies pained my heart, since my parents were unable to finish their studies.”)

Aside from the lack of educational facilities, the other problem in the barangay was the absence of electricity. VM reveals that their barangay was provided power service only in 2000. Prior to the installation of electric posts, they had electric generator sets which they were allowed to use from 7 to 9 p.m. This was the period when the barangay had no budget. Again underscoring the lack of budget in the barangay, VM Daisy says her first salary was a little over PhP1,000 per month. Despite the odds, the electricity project happened during her term. With this development, VM found consolation in the small yet steady improvements in her barangay.

Discussing her track in politics, VM Daisy relates how she was elected as Association of Barangay Captains (ABC) president in 1997 to 2007. She was then already part of the municipal council. In her words, “*Nitaas na ang level.*” (“My political post was elevated.”) Her key functions as

municipal councilor-ex-officio was to look after and assist non-performing barangays. In describing her role, “*Dako na scope sa responsibilities— ikot tanan barangay, gina check ug observe during sessions kung tama ang procedure, makita nga naa gyud records, minutes, attendance.*” (“The position had big responsibilities, such as barangay visits, checking and observing if procedures in the conduct of barangay sessions were followed, checking of records, archiving of minutes and attendance.”) With such tasks being assigned to her, VM Daisy notes that the other barangay captains started to respect her or acknowledge her insights/suggestions. She also notes that, during her term, there were two other female barangay captains. In her last term as ABC President, VM Daisy took notice of the increase in number of women vying for the position as barangay captain. From 10 candidates, five women won the post. VM Daisy considered such increase as a feat for women politicians.

VM Daisy described her strategy when dealing with male politicians. She usually reminds them of a simple technique: one should be faithful to one’s wife. This is a line that has always been part of her speeches in barangay activities. She narrates an instance when her colleague in SB ran for a political post and lost because he was having affairs with other women. As he abandoned his wife and kids, his wife campaigned and convinced her neighbors not to vote for her husband because of his infidelity. The strategy of the wife worked, since it is easy to convince people that her husband is not a model for the community. Thus, VM Daisy utters this line in jest: “*Para makahuman ug termino, palangaon ang asawa.*” (“To finish/complete a term, one should take care of one’s wife.”)

As part of her accomplishment, VM Daisy is the first woman elected Vice-Mayor in their municipality. She has also held the position for three consecutive terms. VM Daisy narrates that she first won the seat against a male opponent. The term after that, another female candidate ran against her. On the third term, she was the only candidate for the post. When asked what contributed to her winning, she describes her work ethic as a politician: honest and truthful work and service were the foundation of her success. She also understood that conflict will only be present when one takes sides because of self-interest and not on principle. To avoid conflict, VM Daisy heeded this advice: “*Serbisyong totoo, walang personalan.*

Walay naka conflict.” (“True service means honest work. One should not make decisions based on personal interest or personalities. This is the way to avoid conflict.”)

A key challenge that she encountered was when she lost the mayoral post in the 2007 elections. It was her first attempt to run for the position. Despite the defeat, she made use of her 2007-2010 period to serve as president of the women’s organization in the municipality. She even represented the municipality in provincial, regional, and national assemblies. She was elected as the Vice President of this organization for Mindanao. During this period, she received numerous invitations to talk about VAWC, provided basic Gender Sensitivity Training (GST), and served as speaker in schools. While citing such commitments, this question was raised: **What was the possible reason for her loss in the 2007 elections?** VM Daisy reflects that it was a close/tight race, as there was only a 2,000 to 3,000 vote difference. The main reason, she says meaningfully, is the difference in resources. It was also her first time to run as the opposition.

Since VM is ending her term in 2019, she proudly notes that their barangay currently has two women barangay councilors. Two men ran against them, but the two women barangay councilors still won. She also happily reports the increasing presence of women in local-barangay politics. Knowing that she is the last politician in their family, VM is planning to run for the mayor’s position. Even noticing that a mayor’s position is usually occupied by men, VM Daisy has decided to take the risk to vie for the post. She also holds on to her faith as her anchor in making such difficult decisions. Deriving inspiration from her faith, “Number one *ang mga tao na mahadlok sa ginoo. Walay imposible nga dili mahitabo.*” (“The most important thing is for people to believe and be God-fearing. Nothing is impossible for those who share the faith.”) As part of VM’s thrust towards education and self-transformation, she is also enrolling in the University of the Philippines’ masteral modules on governance (short program) offered by the National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG). In December 2019, she is expected to finish the program on governance, which she hopes will help her improve in delivering her duties as a public servant with or without the mayoral seat she will run for.

UNFOLDING THEMES

Welfare Oriented Leadership. Maintaining one's approachability is key in ensuring that issues revolving around the welfare and well-being of the people in the community are addressed. This is where the four key informants intersect in their description of their leadership style. For Cong. Glo, her lack of proficiency in the local language did not prevent people from personally coming to their office or approaching her so they could air out their problems. An example of this is one parent confiding to Cong. Glo that she had a child diagnosed with autism, and she was hoping that a form of assistance could be given to them. It is in this instance that Cong. Glo realized that her constituents regard her as capable of providing solutions. Such accounts also remind her to do her utmost in ensuring that funds and projects are brought to the district. This welfare-oriented approach is also evinced in the number of local/community field workers that she has employed. By giving them ample budget for communication, she expects them to regularly provide updates on what is happening on the ground. Since her work regularly sends her to the halls of Congress, she uses technology to ensure that on-going projects are delivered and properly monitored. As of this moment, Cong. Glo is anticipating the completion of a training center in her area. Once the building is done, Cong. Glo looks forward to working with various government agencies, so they can provide the necessary training needed to strengthen local industries.

VM Daisy also regards the personal and hands-on approach as part of her leadership style. When working as the ABC President, she meticulously visited remote barangays and guided them in record keeping, archiving, and even suggesting how to go about legislative proceedings or sessions. Such work made VM Daisy realize that there are a lot of barangays that need guidance and assistance and the huge task that confronts the future of barangays. Using this more involved approach, VM Daisy attributes her physical presence and willingness to teach even the most basic skills to barangay councilors as key to her winning a seat as vice-mayor. VM Doc, conditioned by her medical profession sensibilities, also underscores the close link between a focus on welfare/well-being and ensuring that she remains approachable to the public. Her proof that she remains approachable is, even while playing lawn tennis at the

municipality center, she would welcome people who need her advice, or she would stop in-between games just to accommodate those who have problems/concerns to confide. Her clinic, VM Doc believes, has always been a symbol of her intent to help the people in their municipality.

VM Alberto also highlights stories that she considers as instances when her welfare-oriented type of leadership became most concrete. She discusses, in detail, the case of a person with mental health issues that she encountered wandering near their municipal office. Since she recognized the person, she immediately called him. At the back of her mind, she tried to make sense of the situation, so she thought of offering a part-time job to the person to see if it would help his condition. She gave him some money for food and told him to come back the following day to help clean. The person came back and appeared better and more collected. In the days after, VM Alberto came to realize that some people in the community do come to a point of abandoning themselves to life's situation, especially with the seeming absence of economic options. She also understands that some people are in situations that could make or break them. That is why she attends to people's concerns with due diligence, as she could be their only hope at that exact moment.

For the four key informants, a welfare type of leadership is equated with spending quality time with their constituents. This involves physical presence, reaching out, and maintaining open communication. Cong. Glo, VM Daisy, VM Doc, and VM Alberto also know that, at the end of their term, it is by the quality of people's welfare that they will come to know if they have made a difference in the situation of their municipality or district.

Mixture of self-made and dynastic family. The decision to run for office is guided by the desire to serve and continue the family's contribution to the development of the local community. This is what VM Daisy and Cong. Glo have in common. VM Doc and VM Alberto are both from non-political families. Both started in the world of politics with no prior experience and without having a familiar name that people can associate with political histories. In the case of VM Alberto, a simple invitation intended to simply complete the slate of barangay councilor started her long political career. VM Alberto, however, stresses that her natural desire to help others even when she was not in politics somehow paved the

way for her story as a government elected official. Her political career then continued because of her accomplishments, which for her signifies the people's continuing trust in her. The story of VM Doc shares some similarities with VM Alberto's. Dreaming of having a primary hospital in the community, then realizing the dream only to be eventually confronted by its ensuing closure, VM Doc agreed to run for public office, thinking that the position would help continue her legacy in the community's health program. VM Doc transitioned from a medical doctor who provides affordable health care to a municipal official who still provides the same accessible service but now coupled with the capacity to craft ordinances that will help implement health care programs in the municipality. This is the simple yet substantive formula that VM Doc used, so she can continue being of service to the people of her municipality. **Will other members of the family follow suit?** Of this possibility, VM Doc is unsure.

The more traditional pathways of VM Daisy and Cong. Glo also have unique contexts. VM Daisy's mother was a former vice-mayor who assumed the post after the elected vice-mayor in the municipality died in an accident. This is why VM Daisy maintains that she is still the first woman elected vice-mayor of their municipality. She recognizes the big contribution of her family's political track record in her bid to be the youngest female barangay captain. She, however, stresses that her parents were not initially supportive of her plan. They had other plans for her—like finding a career outside politics or at least running for office at a later stage in her life. With her college degree, however, VM Daisy had the confidence she needed to win the post and be successful in bringing the barangay a little closer to development. She knows that the political name will only afford you a certain amount of success. What will really make you successful as a politician is hard work, transparency, and professionalism. Winning one term will not automatically bring you to your second or third term. Between being a vice-mayor and a barangay captain, VM Daisy points out that there is more fulfillment in the latter, as the position always brings you closer to the ground—to where the people are. With Cong. Glo, she started as the wife of a congressman. It was the track record of her husband that helped her win the congressional seat. Now that she is nearing the end of her first term, Cong. Glo looks forward to the challenge of running again

for the same post. With her husband's support, Cong. Glo has gained this insight on what it means to be a fulfilled politician—that is, to eventually make your own mark.

What is evident in Cong. Glo's and VM Daisy's narratives is that having political capital such as a familiar name is just an entry point or a conventional motivation (Batliwala, 2010) in the world of politics. The more difficult step is how to maintain the people's trust and confidence. For VM Doc and VM Alberto, a common thread in their story on entering the world of politics is that public service prior to any government post is a viable entry point as well. However, like Cong. Glo and VM Daisy, getting a second or third term will be based on their performance and sincerity in helping the district or municipality achieve indicators of progress, more specifically inclusive development.

Politics as Empowering Experience. As elected politicians, the informants regard their post and experiences as something that helped develop their self-confidence in terms of fulfilling the roles and responsibilities of a leader. The transition from doubt to gaining confidence is most apparent in the stories of VM Daisy and Cong. Glo. VM Daisy, for instance, had to contend with doubts coming from her youth. At the age of 22, she had to take the lead in going about the concerns and issues in their barangay, and she had to discuss with more experienced barangay councilors. In the case of Cong. Glo, she had to learn to gradually develop her sense of autonomy outside of her husband's accomplishments as the former Representative of their District and to find ways towards her own achievements. Although Cong. Glo admits that she has a lot to learn still, she takes pride in her husband's own initiative in reminding her that she needs to eventually be independent in terms of decision-making. Thus, after her first term, she already confirmed her plan to run for another term. This time, the decision did not need her husband's approval. It was out of her own reflection that she cemented the decision to run for the same office, and she is convinced that she has a lot to offer in terms of making significant changes in her district.

The confidence that comes from years of experience is also evident in the accounts of VM Doc and VM Alberto. Having been in politics for a long time, both take pride in their capacity to facilitate discussions

and deliberations, to deal with heated arguments between barangay officials during legislative sessions, and their familiarity with the laws and ordinances that their respective municipalities have crafted. Both VM Doc and VM Alberto acknowledge the satisfaction or joy that they derive from having such skills and knowledge. For VM Alberto, the fulfillment also springs from the fact that she is the first woman elected official in their municipality. This is a historic feat for herself and her municipality. In the 2019 elections, their years of experience will stand as the reason why they are almost assured to have a place/position in local politics. VM Doc, for instance, is being encouraged to run for an SB position, since she is considered the oldest and most experienced law maker in their municipality. For VM Alberto, she is invited to run again as municipal councilor, as it is already her third term as vice-mayor.

Part of the reason why the informants improved in self-confidence was overcoming the challenges that they had to deal with. Based on VM Daisy's narrative, one test of her desire to do public service was her defeat when she ran for the mayoralty position. It was the first time that she lost in an election race, but she takes pride in the fact that she ran as the opposition. Noting the small margin of vote differential, she is satisfied with how the people rallied behind her. Despite falling short in electoral votes, VM Daisy did not waver in her interest to serve. She used the three years from 2007 to 2010 to help the women in their province. In the 2019 elections, she had set her sights on running again for the Mayor's post to see if she had what it takes to win. For VM Doc, the challenge that she had to contend with was the lack of financial resources during election period. Noting this limitation, she resorted to her strength, which was her medical profession. By offering free, unlimited check-ups for the people in the municipality, VM Doc became successful in her political endeavors.

Priority Agenda. The issues and concerns that the key informants deal with and address in their respective jurisdictions revolve around immediate needs, access to education, economic empowerment, health, and infrastructure. These are the common agenda that the four women politicians underscore in their narratives. Such concerns are also reflective of the context of their municipalities in terms of access to health services, number of academic institutions, livelihood opportunities (especially for

women), and functional infrastructure such as bridges, training centers, and roads. In the case of VM Doc, it is evident that health remains a priority concern. This is expected as she is a medical doctor by profession. For Cong. Glo, she underscores the need to train teachers who can provide education for people with disabilities. Having a deep understanding of children with special needs—as she has a child of her own who needs special attention—she is aware that the district does not have adequate capacity to provide such kind of education. The significance of this concern is also reflected in her accounts of parents who made an effort to approach her regarding the situation of their children who have autism.

In the case of VM Daisy, her struggles and experience in having to walk several kilometers just to finish her primary and secondary education were more than enough motivation to focus on ways to make education accessible to their barangay and municipality. Since she came from such circumstances, she knows how education changes one's perspective, social position, and economic opportunities. Recognizing the lack of formal education amongst the Subanen in their municipality, she is hoping that more of her constituents will find opportunities to study and have college degrees. For VM Alberto, she also emphasizes education, health, and infrastructure, but her narratives shed light on how she attends to the immediate needs or concerns of her constituents. She derives joy and satisfaction from the fact that her constituents, through the years, continue to approach her especially when they find themselves in dire need of assistance. Based on the accounts shared by VM Alberto, the assistance, however, is not confined to access to medicines or services which the local government can provide. She has also served as the people's adviser on how to file paperwork when they are applying for scholarships or when certain organizations/institutions plan on doing research in the municipality.

Did their agenda change through time? The accounts of the informants suggest that their plans still revolve around immediate needs, access to education, economic empowerment, health, and infrastructure. This mirrors similar studies that show women politicians tend to raise spending on expenditures benefitting women and children (Duflo, 2003); and a study which showed that female governors devote more agenda attention to social welfare policy than their male colleagues (Hedibreder

& Scheurer, 2012). In prioritizing social welfare concerns, Cong. Glo was more specific in hoping that such priorities and undertakings will help their constituents realize that the government exists. This is a point she underscores especially to those who live far from the municipality center. In her field work in such areas, she saw that some communities who live close to the boundary of their municipality and districts live as if they are on their own. Confronted with huge responsibilities and tasks, the four women politicians also make it part of their agenda to talk to each other or, at least, share each other's challenges. This is an underlying strategy that the informants demonstrated during the validation exercise when they had the chance to listen to parts of each other's account.

DISCUSSIONS

(1) Noting Batliwala's (2010) concept of power as a distinguishing feature of feminist transformative leadership, these questions are raised: Is the leadership approach and style of the key informants within accepted gendered roles of women? Do such styles of leadership reinforce gender stereotypes of women? (Chin, Lott, & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007). The accounts of the key informants are informed with descriptions that pertain to nurturing and caring dispositions. While they uphold a welfare-oriented approach, this style needs critical reflection. On one hand, the approach somehow mitigates the distance that hierarchical differences structurally impose between politicians and their constituents. Challenging this structural hierarchy is integral to participatory forms of context-sensitive leadership. Echoing Batliwala (2010), transformative feminist leadership also values non-hierarchical organizational forms/structures. On the other hand, the approach seems to uphold feminine gender stereotypes. It should be noted, however, that the nurturing and caring dispositions are standards that the women politicians also expect themselves to uphold. This is a point underscored in the narratives of the four informants. If such brand of leadership ensures close contact with the people, careful reflection suggests that it may not be fair to automatically treat the perceived feminine characteristics of their brand of leadership as necessarily negative or as the anti-thesis of what transformative feminist leadership stands for. This

is where the welfare-oriented brand of leadership comes into dialogue with expectations conditioned by alienating hierarchies within organizations and relations. For instance, the welfare-oriented approach via the feminine role may be employed as a way of maintaining popularity and perceived effectivity of women politicians or as leverage in ensuring that the people will vote for and support them in the next election. The informants, however, maintain that they find a sense of relevance when they are seen and recognized as approachable and caring. The accounts of ordinary individuals approaching them and opening up about their concerns validate their purpose as public servants. In view of leadership style, such accounts support the idea that women in positions of leadership tend to have more interactive leadership styles, which is democratic in nature as it underscores participation, collaboration, and empowerment through the use of an empathetic approach and caring disposition (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Flammang, 1985; Kathlene, 1994).

(2) Extending Batliwala's (2010) challenge to question discriminatory structures that disenfranchise women politicians from occupying higher or more strategic positions, three informants expressed their readiness to be recommended by their respective political parties to run for a higher position. However, with the political party opting not to choose them and assigning them to other positions, the informants concede to the party's decision. This is where this question finds its order: Is the vice-mayor position, based on the accounts of the informants, treated as more fit for women, and the mayoral seat as more proper for men? While there are female mayors in the district, some political parties in certain municipalities may still harbor beliefs that decision-making is more male-oriented. Such instances seem to mirror power structures in other areas of Filipino society where binary relations such as mother-father/nurses-doctors confine women to traditional roles. For instance, the tedious and detailed task of a vice-mayor in facilitating legislative sessions can be seen as similar to household work, thereby considered more apt for women politicians. In contrast, the mayor's task of crafting the vision and direction of the municipality is treated as a function more appropriate for wealthy men. Such an observation may contextualize a line from an informant when she stated that a vice-mayor should always be supportive

of the mayor's plans. Does this statement foreground the traditional stereotype of women being second fiddle in managing political households—in this case, the municipality?

The political parties' decision not to assign the seasoned women politicians to mayoral positions brings to mind the glass ceiling phenomenon, as there appears to be an invisible barrier that makes it difficult for women to be given higher and more strategic positions (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995ab, as cited in Zeng, 2014). The challenge of such a situation, using Batliwala's (2010) frame makes transparent the reasons for the presence of glass ceilings in the selection of candidates and their positions in political parties. This will be culturally challenging, however, given that key players in political parties of the key informants in this study decide who they think is best suited for specific political positions. The informants generally wait and subscribe to the political party's stance. Despite such a cultural barrier, the challenge remains in finding ways to provide platforms where selection of candidates is rationalized and discussed. This is the proposed constructive-critical approach, in which women politicians understand and can question unchecked habits of assigning them to lower-rank positions. The same approach can be looked into for political parties in the country to address what Shvedova (2005) points out as political and institutional barriers. Gender equity in political representation thus expects political parties to start discussing more equitable assignment of political posts to both women and men. This also means deciding to engage critically with cultural biases and stereotypes that do not put women on equal footing with men.

(3) Applying Agarwal's (2001) types of political participation, the informants who come from political families may have transitioned from nominal to empowered forms of political participation. This implies that their participation in politics started with passive roles, since the decision to run was heavily influenced by the family or a partner. However, the seeming nominal entry point may have to be nuanced given that women's consideration in running varies from the male counterpart, given that women are expected to carry on with care work especially for married politicians. Given this concern, it may not be after all proper to state that they have always been passive in terms of decisions in running for

a political office. This is why the converse may be said for men who also run for a political position. Their decision to run for an office also becomes nominal since their decisions do not factor in care work. This is where this paper holds that nominal political participation also stands for non-participation in reproductive work. The goal here is to also expect male politicians to have plans on how to go about household and care-work responsibilities as they run for political posts. This is proposed so that the route for men too, as they run for a political office, can be contextualized by their reproductive responsibilities.

What counts as nominal participation? Considering how women politician straddle reproductive, productive work, and community roles as supported by the narratives in this study, women politicians who vie for a political post—even if they come from political families—also carry the burden of managing the three interrelated roles of reproductive, productive work, and community roles. Thus, this thought calls for a re-assessment of what it means to be a nominal participant in the realm of politics specifically in the country where politics still leans towards a male-macho political culture, a constraint identified by Sobritchea (2019) and Santos-Maranan, Parreño, and Fabros (2007) so that women can better participate in determining the course of local and national politics.

(4) What counts as empowered political participation as far as the informants' narratives are concerned? Based on their stories, empowerment begins when a woman politician interrogates her leadership approach. Affirming Batliwala's (2010) reflection, this amounts to "examining their own relationship to and practice of power" as they improve in self-knowledge. Such interrogation—as their narratives suggest—brings them back to the kind and quality of service that they provide to the people. Interpreting Agarwal's (2001) perspective of empowered/interactive participation, this paper suggests that the interaction between an interrogating politician and her relevance to the people may serve as a relevant characteristic when one considers and distinguishes empowered political participation from a nominal one. As women politicians distinguish their leadership style, which this paper describes as welfare-oriented, the kind of leadership that they propose cuts across their roles in the family and community and the functions

of their respective offices. It is this straddling of varying roles—although still working within the stereotype of gender roles—that locates the unique kind of empowerment of women politicians. This means that as women politicians attempt to elevate themselves and the people they serve, they also ensure that the family is not left behind. Using Hartsock's (n.d.) point, such type of empowered leadership showcases how women politicians generally regard and use their power as the ability to affect change. But invoking Batliwala's (2010) stance, critique of one's values and ideologies may only be the start of challenging assumed socio-cultural expectations on women in politics. There is a bigger challenge of questioning and changing social structures that perpetuate inequitable gender relations if self-interrogation is to mature into transformative feminist leadership.

CONCLUDING INSIGHTS

The accounts of the four women politicians underscore the need for more stories on women's political participation and leadership approach to help contextualize discussions on empowered political participation and feminist transformative leadership. These narratives offer perspectives and insights on the challenges that confront women politicians in Mindanao and in the arena of local politics in the country. In this paper, a key insight is the reality of a growing dialogical relation between nominal participation and empowered/interactive participation as they each try to push each other's boundaries, question each other's weaknesses, and challenge each other's strengths. There seems to be an inherent yet productive tension between nominal political participation and empowered/interactive political participation as women politicians recognize the delimiting nature and effects of patronage and the dominant, personality-based politics. This improved understanding of the trappings of traditional entry points in politics may usher in and cultivate a different and hopefully progressive kind of thinking, which can turn into something critical, self-examining, and inclusive. Based on the four narratives, it has become a concern for women politicians to at least problematize the meaning of women empowerment in politics and not be content with the ready-made privileges of being part of established political names/

families. The question, “How am I different from the other political members in the family?” seems to demand increasing attention and response. For non-traditional and public service-oriented entry points, the challenge is to ensure that its unique and marginal nature is not co-opted into the language of mainstream politics. The attached value to the claim of having succeeded in winning a post despite not having affiliations with established political capital finds added merit when the politician grows and improves in her understanding of the difference between strong, disciplined, and principled brands of leadership and less interactive or passive forms of political participation.

In relation to cultural habits and expectations, the four narratives help ground the idea that women’s political leadership in Mindanao and, perhaps, in the country still revolves around efforts in finding ways to balance reproductive, productive work, and community work. The reality of this balancing act persists and remains double-edged. On the one hand, it puts more burden on the shoulders of women politicians and, on the other hand, it has become a location that allows them to be more attuned to and circumspect in their roles and responsibilities in the communities that they serve. At some point, the narratives explored in this paper re-affirm the importance of critically appraising this query: Is such a balancing act still at the core of leadership experience of women in politics in Mindanao—and in the country—as both a site of oppression and reflective liberation?

To conclude this discussion, three challenges or recommendations are raised to hopefully address the foregoing query and make Philippine politics more gender fair and the distribution of opportunities for higher political positions more equitable: (1) There should be more enabling mechanisms to assist women politicians who choose to uphold their synergistic approach to political posts; (2) The expectations of balancing reproductive work, productive work, and public service should also be applied to male politicians who tend to dissociate themselves from reproductive work while running for or holding a public office; and (3) Self-interrogating women politicians should be enabled in their transition to becoming feminist transformative leaders by supporting their strategies and initiatives that challenge unfair gender relations (such as VAWC and economic empowerment), while encouraging them to lead more participatory, inclusive, and gender-sensitive projects in their respective communities.

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