

TOWARDS A GENDER APPROACH: PLACING WOMEN AT THE CENTER OF FISHERIES COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the Philippine experience towards a gender approach, i.e., placing women at the center of fisheries community development. It gives the structural and historical determinants on the status of Filipino women. The government policies and programs for development and the involvement of women were highlighted particularly the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) 1993-1998, the Philippine Development Plan for Women (PDPW) and the Fishery Sector Program. The women's role in reproductive i.e., parenting and household management; productive referring to production of marketable goods and services to produce food and cash; and community service which refers to collective consumption of the community, were given emphasis in addition to the specific roles played by women in fisheries development. The needs and problems of women in their participation in fisheries activities were likewise enumerated. Some measures to address the needs and problems were recommended. It was emphasized that women's participation in development can be harnessed by institutionalizing gender-sensitivity and by providing technology and support services.

1. Introduction

Women all over the world in one way or another, have experienced or are experiencing essentially the same societal burden, that of being relegated to the reproductive sphere of life, inequality in economic opportunities and other biases brought about by the prevalence of sex role stereotypes.

In the fisheries sector, the stereotype is, men are the role players in spite of the fact that 50-85 percent of the post-harvest activities are carried out by women. Women also support the production aspect of the sector through ancillary activities like fry gathering, gear preparation, net making or mending.

In most countries, these are not reflected much more addressed in general policies and goals of most programs and projects. This in a way is influenced by the fact that there is no disaggregated data on the men and women's share in fisheries activities.

In the past decade, significant changes on the role and status of women in the Philippines took place. No less than the presidency was occupied by a lady, ex-President Corazon Aquino. In the legislative branch of government there are lady senators and congresswomen. In the executive branch there are women heads of departments and bureaus. However, proportionately, women are still disadvantaged.

The roles played by the Filipino women in reproductive, productive, and community development will be discussed in this paper.

2. Structural and Historical Determinants on the Status of Filipino Women

The Philippine government in response to the International Women's Decade (1976-1985) ratified the United Nations Convention on the "Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" and has committed itself to the "Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women" two of the most important documents that resulted from the decade.

The Philippine Constitution of 1987 stipulates the fundamental equality between women and men and cites the women's role in nation building (Art. II, Section 14), recognized women's maternal and economic role (Art. XIII, Section 14) and women's special health needs (Art. XIII, Section 11), declares natural born those children born of Filipino mothers before the January 17, 1973 Constitution and who elect Philippine citizenship. On July 17, 1987 Executive Order 227, the New Family Code of the Philippines was signed by the President. The New Code eliminates many of the discriminatory provision in the Spanish Colonial law based Civil Code of the Philippines.

Government structures looking after the welfare and development of women are the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW), the Bureau of Young and Women Workers under the Department of Social Welfare and Development. There is also Senate Committee on Women and Family Relations which is in charge of legislation concerning women.

On November 18, 1992, Republic Act. No. 7192, known as Women in Development and Nation Building Act was approved, promoting the Integration of Women as Full and Equal Partners of Men in Development and Nation Building and for other purposes.

3. Government Programs for Development and the Involvement of Women

The Philippine government policies, plans and programs for development include women either as potential implementors or targeted beneficiaries.

3.1 Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP), 1993-1998.

The MTPDP enunciates gender responsive policies and programs in various sectors. For instance, sub-sectoral policies and strategies on agriculture and fishery resources recognized women's role and participation. Specifically, it provides the following: (Silva and Dumlao, 1993).

- (a) Enhance the role and participation of women in agricultural and fisheries production and ensure that they enjoy an equitable share of benefits from development programs and objects; and
- (b) Promote partnership with non-government and people's organizations, local government units (LGU's), and other support groups such as cooperatives, women's and youth organizations, academe and landowners at the provincial level for the speedy and effective implementation of Comprehensive Agrarian Reform (CARP).

As the national development plan already reflects WID/gender concerns in agriculture, it could be assumed that the same concerns automatically filter down to the Medium-Term Agricultural Development Plan (MTADP), 1993-1998. DA is the principal government agency responsible for the promotion of the country's agricultural growth and development.

However, a closer look at MTADP reveals a different picture. While the Plan recognizes the importance of empowering farmers and fisherfolks through the provision of support for the establishment and continued viability of farmer's and fisherfolks' organizations, there is no indication that the specific concerns of women in fisheries are given explicit attention.

3.2 The Philippine Development Plan for Women (PDPW) 1987-1998

The PDPW as approved and promulgated by Executive Order No. 348 is a companion volume of the (MTPDP). It is an initial effort aimed at integrating the concerns of women in the planning process. It aims to alter the traditional concept of women's self-worth as being subordinate to men. Such transformation requires a commitment to one's own personal growth, both intellectually and creatively. It also addresses the concerns of women for equality and development across six major spheres, individual, family, socio-cultural, economic, political and legal.

Executive Order No. 348 directs all government departments, bureaus, offices and agencies to take appropriate action to ensure the implementation of the programs and projects outlined in the Plan.

To implement the Plan, the NCRFW in coordination with the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) set the following measures:

- (a) Creation of WID focal points in each government line agency to review the PDPW, its projects, policies and strategies as to their impact on women's concerns.
- (b) Massive reorientation of the bureaucracy and society through the conduct of gender consciousness-raising programs and training activities NCRFW.
- (c) Provision of technical backstopping by NCRFW to all government line agencies for the effective implementation of PDPW.

In spite of all these, Filipino women in general still continue to be disadvantaged because of biases against them which have been attributed to the kind of socialization process that women and men are subjected to from childhood and carried over to adulthood.

As a result of such biases, only 36 percent of the population 15 years and over who are in the labor force are women, leaving out some 9.3 million women who are outside the labor force and who are considered economically unproductive. Latest estimates indicate that 74 percent of these women are housekeepers or those who enable other members of the family to engage in productive work outside the home whose contributions remain unrecognized (PDPW, 1987-1992).

3.3 The PDPW Agriculture Sector (Including Fisheries)

The basic aim of the PDPW agriculture sector is to provide an environment that shall fully integrate women in the development process. To achieve this integration, national objectives shall focus on the adoption of policies and strategies that shall allow women to participate and contribute in even terms with men in the social, economic and political processes of rural development and share fully and equitably in the gains thereof.

Specifically, the rural/agricultural sector shall concentrate on the following objectives:

- (a) To institutionalize the expanded participation of women in rural/agricultural development;
- (b) To improve and enhance the access of women to agricultural delivery systems and support services;
- (c) To enable women to view their participation in agriculture as partners of men and;

- (d) To raise the level of consciousness of rural population on the important roles that women play in agriculture (PDPW 1987-1992).

3.4 The Fishery Sector Program (FSP)

The Government recognizing the need to reverse the problem of marine resources depletion due to over exploitation launched in 1989 a comprehensive fishery programs. The FSP embodies the policy and commitment of the Philippine Government to the management and conservation of fisheries resources on a sustainable basis. The heart of the FSP is the Coastal Resource Management Program (CRMP) which comprise regeneration of coastal resources, the rehabilitation of the coastal environment, the balancing of fishing effort with maximum sustainable yield, the control of destructive fishing activities, the alleviation of poverty among marginal fishermen particularly through the diversification of their sources of livelihood (Tan, 1995).

However, FSP did not anticipate much more explicitly indicate the role that women would play in resource management. Despite being left out in the design and implementation of FSP women still became active players in various activities. In meetings and training, attendance records showed that 30 percent are women.

4. The Filipino Women

Women's role maybe classified as productive, reproductive and community development and management. Reproductive roles refer to parenting and household maintenance; productive refers to production of marketable goods and services (food and cash); community development and management refers to activities that are for community's collective consumption or use.

4.1 In the Household

A well known Filipino columnist and economist, Mr.Hilarion M. Henares described women as "the sweetheart to her husband and mother to her children, she is also the accountant and treasurer of household finances, the judge and jury of family quarrels, the social secretary , the nurse, the psychologist, the cook and the general handywoman." Mr. Henares continued by saying that "the more enterprising women takes the family savings and goes to business-a small store under the house, a cottage industry or even a pawnshop. She may not always succeed, but if she does chances are, she makes more money than her husband and finds so little time left for the family, that she asks her husband to quit his job and manage the business for her. That is how family fortunes are started by women. But the Filipino women will never admit this, not in a manner that might rob her husband of his prerogatives as king of the manor and lord of his creations.

It is in this light that Filipino women play her unique role as the traditional keeper of savings and investment, the entrepreneurs and founders of family fortunes and as the focal center of the home and of the Philippine Society."

In a study conducted in a coastal community, it was reported that women belonging to households that primarily engage in fishing contribute around 40 percent of their time to fishing endeavors and 30 percent each is spent on housekeeping and on other activities (Lamug et al, 1995).

4.2 In Fisheries Development

Women in fishing communities play important roles in fisheries development most especially in post-harvest activities and marketing, and to some extent in fish production. In urban communities, the involvement of women is mostly in marketing both as broker/wholesaler or as retailer. However these roles that women play in fisheries development are not documented. While estimates on the number of fishermen are available, the data are not gender segregated, hence, the traditional assumption that fisheries activities involve the male population. For this reason, most government policies and programs before the 80's were geared towards men. During the 80's especially with the development of the Philippine Development Plan for Women, policy makers and government planners started to integrate the concerns of women. Projects have involved women either as implementors or targeted beneficiaries.

Women's involvement in fisheries development can be one or combination of the following activities.

- (a) ***Fish marketing or vending.*** Marketing is the most visible activity of women in fishing communities. In most cases, wives of small scale fishermen and fish farmers sell their husbands' catch within the community or in nearby markets. The volume that they sell is dependent upon the catch of their husbands. Whatever proceeds from the sale of fish is considered as the fishermen's earning not considering the profit gained from selling the fish direct to consumers.

Women involved in fish marketing, work almost eight hours a day for 19 days a month, 12 months a year (Villareal,1993). A case study of women in a Central Philippine town describes fish vending by women (Silva and Dumlao, 1993). "Fish vending is a full time actively of several village women whose husbands are artisanal fishermen.". These women claim that their minimal income is critical in enabling the family to survive on a day to day basis.

- (b) ***Fish processing.*** In the Philippines, the role of women in fisheries operations particularly in fish processing and marketing can not be understated. A study reported that 56 percent of the women in fishing communities are involved in fish processing (de Castro cited by Silva and Dumlao, 1993).

In most coastal communities, the volume of production is small-scale, hence, the processing industry is also mostly household based.

Fish caught for the day that cannot be absorbed by the fresh fish market are processed either as salted, dried or smoked products.

In a study (Legaspi et al 1991) on the role of women in marketing and processing, which involves 1,666 fish processing workers, 50 percent were women, of these 92 percent are hired as laborers and only three percent each are doing supervisory/ managerial work, and clerical work. The study also reported that of the 113 women interviewed, 23 percent are owner operator of the plant, six percent do administrative work and 80 percent are hired workers directly involved in processing.

- (c) ***Fry gathering.*** In coastal areas where fry is abundant, it is a common sight for men, women and children gathering fry. Income derived from fry gathering supplements the husband's income from fishing.
- (d) ***Gear preparation.*** Wives of fishermen using multiple hook and line gears are the ones who prepare the gears by disentangling the line and putting baits on each hook. This activity takes almost as much time consumed by the fishermen during fishing. Sad to say, these activities being done by women are not considered as the women's contribution in the family income.
- (e) ***Fishing.*** A survey of women in a fishing village (Lagua, 1981) revealed that a substantial number are engaged in fishing activities. Of the 628 women interviewed, 487 are engaged in fish capture, and 15 in gathering shellfishes and seaweed. This discounts the traditional assumption that fishing is men's activity.
- (f) ***Net mending.*** Wives of fishermen help in the making and/or mending of fishing nets. Women usually do this activity in the afternoon after they have finished their household chores or when the children are in school or sleeping in the case of pre-schoolers.
- (g) ***Fishing boat owner/operator or financier.*** There are women who own fishing boats and hire fishermen. Some act as financier of small fishermen. The financier women if not paid in cash have the option to buy the borrower's catch at a lower price. Consequently, they act as broker or wholesaler.
- (h) ***Aquaculture.*** Women play important roles in aquaculture such as helper in the preparation of fishponds and seedlings preparation, marketing of produce and purchase of farm inputs. Women are usually the ones doing research to increase their production and to prevent the occurrence of diseases.

In the FAO project in Capiz and Pangasinan, it was reported that some women are engaged in crab fattening and mussel culture projects.

4.3 Community Development and Management

Women in fishing communities play important roles in projects such as community beautification, health and nutrition, social events like feast of the patron saint and other religious and/or civic affairs.

Women's active involvement in various activities in the community, not to mention their fisheries economic endeavor make them popular. This popularity sometimes land them in an elected local government position such as council woman, barangay chairman or mayor. As local government official they excel in community development projects particularly in family planning, child and youth health welfare, environment protection and management and other developmental programs.

5. Needs and Problems

In most rural communities in developing world; women not only face most or all of the constraints confronting men, but also which men do not face. Some of the problems particularly those involved in post-harvest activities are the effects of the problems faced by the industry as a whole.

5.1 Low Production Affects Post Harvest Activities.

Due to the depleted fishery resources and the subsequent decrease in production, less and less fish is being processed, and/or marketed hence, less job opportunities for women.

5.2 Inadequate Infrastructure Support to Post-harvest.

Infrastructure facilities like ice plants and cold storage transport facilities, markets, processing and storage facilities are still inadequate or inaccessible. These results to great post-harvest loss which means less economic return not only for women but to the whole industry.

5.3 Difficulty in the Availment of Credit.

Credit support to fisheries development projects is usually awarded to members of cooperatives. In most cases, the members of the fishermen's cooperatives are the male members of the family, usually the head of the family or the one who goes out fishing. This makes it difficult for women to avail loan for their own investment. In some cases, collateral is required to be able to avail loan, which generally can not be met by women.

5.4 Limited Opportunity for Decision Making Positions.

Where women are employed by big processing establishments, the positions that they occupy are usually those that require manual skill like fish filleting,

deboning, peeling of shrimp and other labor intensive activities. Very few women occupy managerial positions.

5.5 Need to Focus on Women's Roles in the Planning and Implementation of Fisheries Development Programs.

Most fisheries development programs are directed to fishermen which by tradition are presumed to be for men. Even the credit component of program are designed for associations and cooperatives which in most cases majority of the members are men. It was only during the recent years that women have started to become members of association and cooperatives. This recent development has slowly placed women in the mainstream of development programs but in the implementation phase their involvement lost its focus.

All the above activities that women do in fisheries development are not documented in terms of extent and economic value. However, elicited data on these activities have been undertaken.

5.6 Limitation in Attendance to Training.

In the past most fisheries training programs have been geared towards men. Training on fish processing which is meant for women has to be scheduled to meet the women's free time. In most cases, mothers bring with them their pre-school children because no one can attend to them at home.

5.7 Need to Consider the Impact of Technological Developments.

The traditional role that women do particularly in what used to be labor intensive activities that need manual skill should be considered in technological innovations. Appropriate technology must therefore be developed to improve women's participation in major fisheries development activities.

5.8 Need for Adequate Data and Information (Silva, et al, 1993)

The extent of women's participation in productive work is obscured by a serious lack of data, which occurs on two levels. First, fishers are lumped together with other agricultural workers in labor surveys, making it difficult to pinpoint the particular contributions of the sector. Second, studies or publications on the fishery industry do not have sex disaggregated data and often do not distinguish between male and female roles and participation.

5.9 The Burden of Domestic Chores.

The burden of attending to all domestic duties is almost always assumed to be women's responsibility. In effect, women more than men are restricted in their participation in activities away from home. This makes their participation in economic activity an added burden. In fishing communities, if the wife is to engage in

economic activities, the burden of doing household is delegated to the oldest daughter, who more often than not is deprived of the right to formal education.

6. Recommendation

Considering the needs and problems of women in small-scale fisheries communities, the following measures are recommended in order to enhance women's participation in comprehensive programs of fishing community development.

6.1 Conduct a nationwide assessment of the role of women in fisheries development. The role that women play in fisheries development, although not quantified and documented cannot be taken for granted. There is a need for empirical data to authenticate this reality and be able to justify to the planners and decision makers the need to mainstream gender concerns in fisheries development programs. The plan should explicitly indicate the concerns of women i.e. the what, who and how of the project particularly the implementors and the targeted beneficiaries.

6.2 Encourage women involved in fisheries activities to organize. Women involved in fisheries must be encouraged to organize or be members of associations and cooperatives. Inasmuch as credit support to government projects is usually awarded to associations and/or cooperatives, women must be encouraged to be members of organized groups. This will enable them to access credit for their livelihood projects.

6.3 The problem in the Philippines is not so much the absence of political will or lack of gender-sensitivity as the inadequacy of methodology or approaches to address gender issues. A lot of advocacy has been done and national laws and policies on women are already in place. However, operationalization and the required resources for implementation are still wanting. Hence, among the overriding concerns of the national machinery on women is ensuring that government departments set up the necessary structure to implement gender-responsive programs and bringing these down to the direct beneficiaries.

6.4 Development programs and projects in coastal communities must include gender-sensitivity for both men and women to enable them to appreciate shared parenting, joint decision making and shared resources in a family, the workplace and within the community. This hopefully would break the norm and stereotyped ideas in most societies about the roles of women as subordinate to men not only in the household but also in the workplace in the community.

6.5 Provide equal opportunities for men and women in the planning and implementation of skills development training programs. The training needs of women must be considered. in relation to their participation in development projects.

6.6 Appropriate technology must be developed to improve women's participation in fish production activities, while taking into account limitation such as lack of capital and other reproductive activities.

6.7 Women's capability to protect the environment must be tapped and strengthened through proper orientation, training and provision of appropriate logistic support.

Generally, it may be said that women's participation in development can be harnessed by institutionalizing gender-sensitivity and by providing appropriate technology and support services.

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