The Role of Women
In the New Millennium

By
Aurea G. Miclat-Teves

Peoples Development Institute
Quezon City, Philippines
Copyright: PDI 2015
The Role of Women in the New Millennium

CONTENTS

I. Vision, Goals and Objectives of the Women’s Movement
II. Existing Condition of Filipino Women
III. Movement Toward Women Empowerment
IV. Gains and Achievements of the Women’s Movement
V. Marching to the Next Millennium
Annex. Women Leaders in the Workplace

References
The Role of Women in the New Millennium

Vision, Goals and Objectives of the Women’s Movement

The Vision of feminism in the new millennium is a non-sexist society in which there will be no discrimination whether by race, gender or class, in the production and allocation of economic resources. It would also be a society where power is not assigned in accordance with one’s class, race, gender and where individual civic rights are respected and upheld. Such a society would have to respect, encourage and animate traditional female values but not restrict them to only one—half of the population, who by virtue of its gender, is categorized as subordinate to the other (Quintos-Deles, 1995, P. 158).

Women all over the country envision a nation where women call stand equal to men. But more than equality, women look forward to a society where women, as well as men, will be free to decide for themselves the path the country will take towards development; where all persons, men and women alike, will be able to enjoy the fruits of their labor; amid where class nor gender will no longer be a basis for division of labor, wealth and social status.

The ultimate goal of women’s liberation is the removal of all structures and relations of gender oppression, and with it, the end to practices and concepts of gender discrimination.

The recognition of women’s liberation must start with the recognition of the comprehensiveness of the oppression of women, not just in celebrated cases, but more so in its everyday forms, in the totality of the structures and relationships that keep women subjugated to men.

We now have to work towards the emancipation of women. This includes the struggle against women’s subordination to the men within the home; against their exploitation by the family; against their continuing low status at work, in society, and in culture and religion, against their double burden of production and reproduction. It challenges the very notion of femininity and masculinity as mutually exclusive, biologically determined categories (Torres, 1990, p.29).

The women’s movement today embraces millions of women and men who are active in social change. The women’s movement is a loosely linked collection of non-government organizations, people’s organizations, coalitions, networks, single and multi-purpose collectives, interest groups and individuals.

Feminism, regardless of ideological influences, simply refers to ideas and movements that seek in various ways to improve the status of women. Feminism is the most potentially powerful challenge to the status quo, precisely because it calls for struggle against all forms of oppression (Se and Crown, 1987, p. 19).

Women’s liberation shall humanize individuals, relationships, movements and structures. Such process of humanization is a long and arduous struggle where battles are waged simultaneously in the personal and political realms. At the kernel of the struggle are the transformation of deep-
seated values and attitudes towards oneself, other women and men, and the interweaving of these values with other liberating values borne out of the struggle against classism and racism (Josefa Francisco, p. 12).

While many sectors continue to treat women’s movement as an auxiliary or support movement whose role is to “provide highlights to class and sectoral issues,” women are asserting through their own action and reflection what is also a multisectoral, multi-class movement capable of advancing a comprehensive struggle for national, class and gender liberation, all in the interest of the people’s movement. All issues of social change are, after all, women’s issues (de Vera, March 1.992, p. 10).

**Existing Condition of Filipino Women**

They say women have come a long way (Virginia Slims advertisement). But the struggles of Filipinas are far from over.

In the Philippines, almost half (46%), especially those in the rural areas have not heard or read of women’s right. About a fifth (18%) are aware but do not pay any attention to it. Almost a fourth (23%) would like additional information; less than a tenth (6%) talk about it and advocate women’s rights (PJR, p. 23, Dec. 1995).

Fifty-nine percent of women in the Philippines live in the rural areas. Social scientists say that through the years, these women have been perceived as plain household helpers. But with the changing social and political landscape, many are recasting their views and are beginning to consider this traditional perception as myopic. Today, as women continue to assert themselves in various fields, more and more female farmers are becoming aware of their various roles in agriculture. Some of them have been reexamining their sense of self-worth, re-assessing themselves, and hurdling the gender gap.

“Women hold half the sky,” said Chinese leader Mao Zedong. This assertion is easier to dispute inside the home, where in perhaps majority of the cases, the women are the dominant force in the family. But outside the home, there remains an uphill climb for the women (Cunanan, Philippine Daily Inquirer).

Women have multiple roles. Women are wives, mothers, food producers, educators and income earners. They are primarily responsible for the well being of the family and for running the household. They pass on value systems and varied skills to the children, providing them basic training and skills for the future. As food producers and income earners, they are concerned primarily about the family’s survival and, secondly, about generating surplus for the household.

While the multiplicity of roles proves that women are integral partners in the development process, the question remains: do women stand on equal footing with men in the creation of access to opportunities and resources? While development planners recognize the need to harness the potentials of women, actions taken to advance this are still inadequate because
despite the growing recognition given to women, they still face biases and their circumstances tend to inhibit their fuller participation in development (Llanto).

Even as there is a growing realization of the need for women’s greater participation in society, most of Filipinas of working age (15 years old and above) are excluded from the labor force. Hired household helps, who are mostly women, are paid a measly P600 — P1,000 a month, although with free board and lodging. They are badly paid considering that they work most of their waking hours and stay on call even while sleeping.

Stretching the family income is an added responsibility, and women have become quite adept at looking for every possible means to earn. Women make up most of the urban informal sector or the so-called underground economy. They are the sidewalk vendors, peddlers, sari-sari store operators, launderers/pressers and other domestic helpers, or workers in small-scale industries — workers who are not accounted for in labor force, statistics, and thus are largely unrecognized, unprotected and underpaid.

In the agricultural sector, women contribute 30% - 40% of the family income. Peasant women, though they are not allowed to own farmlands, do most of the planting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, and other farm work. They also work as part-time agricultural workers whenever there is work available in the area.

Much of the women’s work is therefore officially unrecognized. Women perform roles that are unpaid, underpaid or undervalued, and generally taken for granted (Ibon Facts and Figures, Vol.16 No. 15, August 1.5, 1993).

According to the National Statistics Office, in 1992 alone, there were more than 9 million women in the labor force, which represents 52% of women of working age. This is almost half of the men’s figure of 94%. For every 10 employed men, only 6 females are officially employed and for every 10 unemployed men 8 women are also officially out of work.

Based on the NSCB Yearbook on Employed Women by Major Industry and by Major Occupation, the breakdown of female workers by industry and occupation reveals the nature of jobs reserved for women. These are jobs that are related to their role as nurturers and homemakers: cooking, sewing, caring for the children and the sick, and serving men. They are also relegated to the jobs that require low-level skills and great patience, which are suited to their “nature” as hardworking and submissive workers.

Working women are usually ascribed the phrase “liberated women” because they have supposedly freed themselves from economic dependence on their parents and husband. What is not readily apparent, however, is that first, women’s incomes are usually contributed to the family’s income, and thus their economic independence is really a big myth.

Second, working women carry the double burden of working in and out of the house. Sometimes, this double burden is tripled when working women are also expected to perform community functions and civic duties.
Working women are also subjected to another form of exploitation; gender discrimination in the workplace. Discrimination against women starts even before hiring, as men are usually preferred over women. Placement ads usually read “preferably male,” or if women are wanted, they must have a “pleasing personality,” they must be “young” (18 to 25 years old), single and a college graduate.

According to the Bureau of Women and Youth Workers, women practically work the same number of hours as the men. This is inspite of the lack of support systems for working mothers, such as day care centers or nurseries. Also, employers seem to be overlooking women when promotion is due as more men are easily promoted. The Institute for Labor Studies says that males get promoted 2.8 times on the average, while women only 2.5 times.

Women in government account for 51.4 % or 723, 789 out of the total 1.41 million government workers; 90.4% of them are career personnel. Despite this big number of women, the same pattern of gender bias found in private companies exists in government offices. Women are poorly represented in decision-making positions as women make up only 31% of career executives (service chiefs, bureau directors up to undersecretaries), depriving women of opportunities to assume more central roles in policy-making.

Of the overseas domestic helpers and entertainers, the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) is reported to have deployed a total of 382, 229 land-based contract workers, 47.2% of whom are women. More than half of women OCWs (59.7%) are service workers, 75.9% of them are classified as domestic helpers. More than a third (34.8%) are doing professional, technical and related work, with entertainers accounting for slightly more than 50.3%. These figures are very conservative, as Filipina workers who went out of the country do not have working visas. Many of them were able to work abroad by going as tourists or as mail-order brides, or other illegal means.

Women OCWs are often maltreated, their contracts violated, their salaries not paid, suffer physical and sexual assault, overwork and other abuses. They also have to cope with racial discrimination, anxiety about being illegally employed, loneliness, marital break-ups, neglect of children, and other psycho-social impacts of migration. Cases of suicide are not rare. Women are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation because of their gender.

Aside from this, the government has not adequately responded to the women’s need for health and nutrition services. This results in the worsening of health of millions of women. (Ibon Facts and Figures 1993)

Sexual violence against women happens everywhere, yet authoritative statistics on the extent of sexual violence are not available. Victims are usually overcome by fear, shame or embarrassment, which prevent them from reporting incidences of violations. Nevertheless, according to police reports, there was an average of four rapes a day since 1989, but only two out of ten rape cases are reported to the police. (PDI, Vol. V, No. 1)
Movement Toward Women Empowerment

More and more, women recognize that they themselves have to unite and act as one in order to end centuries of oppression and exploitation. They are organizing themselves, raising consciousness and confidence, discovering problems and working hard for solutions.

At present, there is a multitude of women’s organizations doing organizing, education and advocacy work for women’s feminist issues, most of them are sectoral in nature. Women’s organizations among peasants, urban poor, students, professionals, media and religion have also sprouted in the last decade. A notable development is the establishment of women’s desks in trade unions/federations, which cater specifically to women workers’ needs and problems.

Other women’s organizations are issue-oriented, with health and reproduction, overseas employment, children and family, prostitution and mail-order brides being the most popular issues. There exist several women’s groups, which mainly do research and education work.

The women’s movement today embraces millions of women and men who are active in social change. The women’s movement is a loosely linked collection of non-government organizations, people’s organizations, coalitions, networks, single and multipurpose collectives, interest groups and individuals.

The women’s movement’s strength lies in its unwavering commitment to social, political, cultural and economic changes in behalf of Filipino women. Amid seemingly insurmountable odds, women are discovering their potentials and strengths individually, determined to move ahead.

Problems Within the Women’s Movement

Problems exist within the women’s movement. At various times in history, the movement has been torn by conflict and tensions, which have threatened to weaken its unity, dilute its gains and achievements, and override its strengths.

The problems can be classified into two: ideological problems and political problems, which have caused considerable stress and strain on the movement.

1. Hostile Environment. The movement’s external environment has been hostile particularly to its progressive section. This hostility comes from the unorganized public and sections of the Left. The public, due to its fear and ignorance, and the Left, out of its difficulties in coming to grips with the woman question and patriarchy.

Despite the fact that the issues and problems articulated by women activists are grounded on their specific lives and experiences, generating a sense of solidarity and shared fate between women and men has been a long and slow process. Engaging the commitment of women and men sympathetic to the political movement has been difficult with the portrayal of women’s groups as radical, immoral, and rabid anti-men troublemakers.
Raising women’s rights has been dismissed earlier as unnecessary by such groups because they assert Filipino women’s higher status in relation to other Asian women. They also criticized the women’s movement as a replica of western feminism and as representing middle class interests (Miralao, p. 12 and Maranan, p. 83). These negative images of the women’s movement have contributed to the reluctance of many women to be identified with it. It has illustrated the difficulties in helping the public understand women’s oppression (Miralao, p. 13).

2. **Structural and Ideological Problems: Opposing Views.** As the women’s movement confronted the external opposition, it also encountered problems within its own stream. While diversity has been a source of strength of the women’s movement, it also caused conflict, anger and pain in the various women’s organizations with different perspectives, strategies and methods. The problems associated with the structural and ideological diversities of the women’s movement are not minor. Differences and debates within the various ideological formations influenced women’s groups adversely (Angeles, p. 12).

3. **Expansion and Focus.** Problems associated with expansion exacerbated the situation. The movement’s growing network ensured its presence in almost every of society but does not necessarily guarantee its effectiveness. Problems of coordination are magnified and energies overstretched. Trying to accomplish too many goals with limited resources siphoned off a great deal of women’s energies and, time. Proceeding in many directions at once put it in contact with every aspect of women’s lives, but by the same token, led to a lack of focus. Thus, the movement has been going in many directions simultaneously, engaging its members with quite contradictory ideas of what is ultimately desirable.

4. **Inadequate Theoretical Moorings.** The lack of focus may be attributed to the undeveloped theoretical moorings of the women’s movement (Maranan, p. 87, de Vera, p. 14 and Angeles, p. 27). The inadequacy of a scientific examination of the woman question within the context of the Filipina’s position in a developing country has complicated the debates within. This has caused some confusion in the analysis of women’s oppression, at times even affecting the movement’s overall directions (Maranan, p. 88). Explaining specific issues like prostitution or pornography, issues of sexuality, patriarchal control of reproduction, are taken instead from western references (de Vera, p. 14).

5. **Competition for Funds and Influence.** Another obstacles to success is the unhealthy competition of groups for funds, influence and adherents. Some members become personally estranged by dissent arising from the competition, or by compromises made to ensure a steady flow of funds. The problems over funds are not limited to pure competition alone. The opening in development assistance for programs and projects for women has likewise sparked a lot of controversy (de Vera, p. 16). While it can be used for truly relevant projects for women, it compromised the priorities and principles of women’s organizations and fostered dependency on foreign aid.
Gains and Achievements of the Women’s Movement

1. A most significant achievement was its role in mobilizing thousands of women from all sectors in dismantling the Marcos dictatorship.

2. The proliferation of women’s groups and organizations integrating gender concerns into their programs.

3. Shows how the collective efforts of the various women’s groups have started to impinge on the people’s collective consciousness.

4. The movement’s gains have also gone beyond Philippine shores by being considered as one of the most vigorous in the developing world.

Marching to the Next Millennium

The local, national and global character of the women’s movement, its role within the Left in pursuing revolutionary change and the discipline, energy and dedication it has mustered during various stages of struggles can be said to have brought the women’s movement to where it is now.

Identifying the problems in the women’s movement is half the battle but the situation is not irreversible, as gains and achievements have been scored within the last decades. Women’s commitment can push forward our vision for the new millennium.

To confront the problem, there is a need to develop an integrated development framework for women in support of the vision of women empowerment. This is necessary to bridge the gap made by over expansion, structural and ideological problems and inadequate theoretical moorings.

The women’s development framework ought to detail the empowerment process that can spell clear-cut development stages on how to achieve the empowerment of women in the next millennium.

Based on the above framework, a comprehensive women’s program and the accompanying operational system must be developed to consolidate all the various women’s groups under one umbrella with varying strategies but with one goal and one vision and resolve structural problems and maintain organizational focus.

Furthermore, institutional capacities and/or organizational capabilities must be geared towards the achievement of the women’s goals and vision in order to establish adequate theoretical moorings.
This is critical to the overall success of our struggle for women’s liberation

Thus, we must forge unity at all fronts and link arms to solidify our forces to march in step and realize the vision of women empowerment in the next millennium.

Annex.  

WOMEN LEADERS IN THE WORKPLACE

Breaking the Glass Ceiling

by Ernie Cecilia
(Excerpt from People at Work, Philippine Daily Inquirer, 31 Jan 2001)

Once upon a time, women’s role in life was limited to reproduction, child-rearing and domestic chores and the women’s place was the home.

Then, Abigail Adams and a few women’s rights advocates cried out loud and the whole world listened. They got the attention needed when they said, “If a particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.”

Suddenly, the fairytale was shattered and the boundaries of the real world of women extended beyond the realm of the domestic household.

Women’s Success

Today, the workplace is replete with women’s success stories in fields earlier dominated by men. It is estimated that 25 per cent of chief executive officers in America are women. But this is in stark contrast to the grim reality that probably two thirds of the women in the world today are poor, uneducated and jobless.

In business, government and non-government organizations in the Philippines today, we continue to see the ascendance of women to top leadership posts. Whether by constitutional fiat or by coup d’état, we have a woman at the helm of the Philippine government.
Characteristics

What makes leaders tick in the workplace? What makes people want to follow women leaders? What do women have that makes them natural leaders?

From a man’s point of view, a few observations of successful women leaders show the following qualities:

1. **Character**

To inspire confidence, a leader must have character. The development of character is at the very heart of development as a person and as a leader. Women, by nature of their roles at home in the early stages of development, are trained to be paragons of honesty, respectability and integrity. Mothers forbid their daughters from engaging in any form of vice and exact a great measure of honesty from them. The degree of integrity required of a growing daughter is usually greater than that of a growing son. It is not surprising that some women grow up to have stronger bed rock character.

2. **Flexibility**

That women are quick to “change their minds” is a misconception. Actually, they are only being flexible and can adapt to changing situations more easily. Ed Oakley and Goug Krug, in “Enlightened Leadership,” aver that the new leadership roles require “creating a major shift in their people’s mindsets from one that naturally searches for new and innovative solutions.”

3. **Discernment**

Many women, who are bombarded with a daily barrage of information from radio, newspapers, gossipping neighbors, intriguing work mates, or even philandering husbands, have learned to discern and ferret out the truth.

4. **Servanthood**

The new form of leadership is servanthood or servant leadership. If your mindset of a servant is a lowly domestic position, it is about time you disabuse your mind. Servant leadership is not about position. It is about an attitude of service. This is not new to women whose traditional rote early in life is to serve.

Eugene B. Habecker said, “The true leader serves. Serves people. Serves their best interests and in so doing, will not always be popular, may not always impress. But because true leaders are motivated by loving concern rather than a desire for personal glory, they are willing to pay the price.”
5. **Attitude**

The psychologist William James revealed, “the greater discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitude of mind.” Many women, perhaps borne out of circumstance or past experiences, develop a positive attitude and never give up. They are usually more patient and more persevering. Generally, women also have a higher threshold of pain and frustration. In this case, Zig Ziglar is right in saying “attitude, not aptitude, determines altitude.”

6. **Passions**

You probably will not remember who Marya Skladowska was. She was born of poor parents, spent her early life doing chores but had a passion for learning. She became a governess and tutor and supported her elder sister and herself to school in Paris. She topped her Physics class, had a master’s degree in mathematics and worked full-time researching on her passion for secret of the uranium rays. She later met Pierre who became her husband and research partner. She made breakthroughs in radioactivity and finally opened the door to the study of nuclear physics and medical radiology with her discovery of the x-ray. She pursued her passion even after Pierre died. Today, people know her as Madame Curie.

7. **Vision**

John Sculley, former CEO of Pepsi and Apple computer, once said, ‘The future belongs to those who see possibilities before they become obvious.” Today, there are probably more men than women who are successful visionaries in the workplace. But, the difference is that women seem to have more passion in their vision. They sleep over it, dream about it even when awake, and pursue it to the hilt. Also girls at an early age start to dream of the future they want. Boys usually dabble with present realities.

These are some of the outstanding characteristics of successful women leaders in the workplace. These are some of the reasons why they break the glass ceilings and go even beyond their perceived potential.

The new economy calls for new paradigms of leadership. Women, with their own innovative version of leadership, are part of this new generation of leaders.
REFERENCES

Belinda Olivares Cunanan, columnist, Philippine Daily Inquirer


Framework for the Integration of Women in APEC. New Zealand, August 1999.


Lessons Learned from the Promotion of Savings Groups to Eliminate Poverty and Empowerment of Women (A Case Study on the Slum’s Welfare Savings Group and the Savings Group of Workers in the Area of Om Noi-Om Yai, Thailand). Not dated.

Morales Horacio. The Multifaceted Role of Women in the Next Millennium, Speech delivered during the celebration of Women’s Month, 22 March 1999.


