

Engendering Local Governance

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This study looks at three main ingredients of engendering women participation in local governance: (1) national policies which serve as impetus for implementation in the grassroots; (2) active and committed advocates at the local level; and (3) local chief executives who are committed to gender concerns, be they female or male. Using data on women local chief executives and case studies on women officials and local government activities, this study posits that there is gradual increase in the participation of women in electoral politics and rapid strides in the activities of women's groups. However, more have to be done in terms of local legislation and paying closer attention to issues affecting women. Moreover, there is need to orient local officials—men as well as women, about the need to engender local governance.

Introduction

The Philippines has a unique political experience in that the country has had two women Presidents who came to power only some years apart. These two women Presidents actually have more commonalities than gender. First, their elevation to the highest office came about after a people power revolution which deposed two male Presidents perceived to be corrupt. Second, and what is relevant to this discussion, they have close kinship to prominent politicians. Corazon C. Aquino is the wife of martyred Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr., while Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is the daughter of former President Diosdado Macapagal.

While Cory (name of Corazon C. Aquino, as she is popularly called) and GMA (acronym of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo) may be examples of empowered Filipino women, we must take caution in concluding that Filipino women are such because two of them have become Presidents. To say that Filipino women are really politically potent, we must look at the range of political mechanisms by which women may be empowered: (1) the electoral process involving voters and candidates, and (2) civil society

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where women participate as program advocates. However, political potency likewise denotes the ability to make decisions on policy formulation and program implementation.

Adopting the development framework of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), this study defines women's political empowerment as "women and men are able to actively participate in economic and political life and take part in decisionmaking" (UNDP 1995: 73). Furthermore, in modifying GEM, this study focuses only on women in local governance, since it is an area where efforts in political empowerment are easier studied through using micro lenses.

Gender and Local Governance

The role of women in development has been given emphasis since the United Nations (UN) held its first conference on women in Mexico in 1975. Since then, the UN has followed up its activities with its conferences on women such as those held in Copenhagen in 1980, in Nairobi in 1985, in China in 1995, and its regional conferences. More importantly, the UN has gathered country signatories in its conventions upholding different aspects of women's lives. Country signatories are expected to adhere to the terms of the conventions, such as increasing women's participation in decisionmaking levels in the bureaucracy (as much as 30 percent to the ideal 50 percent).

GEM considers percentage of seats held in Parliament by women, percentage of women administrators and managers, percentage of women professional and technical workers, and percentage share of women in the earned income. For purposes of this study, GEM is merely used as a take-off point for arriving at indicators for engendering governance. For this study, engendering governance is defined as the process by which we provide for greater power of women in governance. Governance, of course, is not government, but "the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels" (UNDP 1997: IV). The level which UNDP focuses on now is local governance. In our own definition, the process of engendering is making sure that gender relations provide for equal opportunities for male and female. If engendering, as described here, is skewed towards increasing women's participation, it is because the patriarchal theme which pervades Philippine society has left women behind in many aspects of life, especially in politics and governance.

Engendering is discussed at the level of local governance, for a more focused approach, and in keeping with the present thrust of the UNDP. In the words of eminent economist Solita Monsod, "development which is not engendered is endangered" (Monsod n.d.). We start with the premise that local governance must be engendered. In modifying the GEM for local governance, we focus on three main concerns: (1) election of women local chief executives (LCEs), (2) women LCEs' advocacy of women-oriented programs; and (3) women's advocacy at the grassroots level. But engendering does not only mean direct roles of women; it can also mean other advocacies leading to women's greater empowerment. Thus, we add a fourth dimension: local government units (LGUs) initiatives for gender in the local government itself.

Of course, voting by women is a process of engendering. However, data on local level voter output by LGU are not available at this time. Another element we can consider is the election of women to the local legislative councils, but data we have at the moment preclude longitudinal comparison.

Filipino Women as Local Chief Executives

The Cory and GMA phenomenon is not unique in Philippine political culture. Gabriela Silang took over her husband's leadership of the Ilocano rebels against Spain when Diego Silang was killed. In the same manner, Magnolia Welborn Antonino ran for and won the Senate seat her husband was running for when he died in a plane crash. This is a theme we will find repeated throughout the Philippines' political history—women taking over the posts of husbands or fathers.

Our studies of women's political participation in local elections show an increasing trend of women's election into the office of LCE. Figures for 1992, 1995, 1998, and 2001 of elected Provincial Governors and City Mayors are shown in Table 1. The leaps can be seen as higher in 1998 and 2001. This will be explained later.

For municipalities, data from the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) in 2001 are still incomplete, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) election results not yet included. Furthermore, the listing of COMELEC is not gender disaggregated (at this day and age), and we had to make manual identification of female names (which is never 100 percent accurate). For 1992, 1995, and 1998, we have Table 2.

Table 1. Elected Women Governors and City Mayors, 1992, 1995, 1998, and 2001

<i>Position</i>	<i>No. of Female LCEs</i>	<i>No. of LGUs Reporting</i>	<i>% of Female LCEs to Total</i>
1992			
Governor	5	75	6.67
City Mayor	2	67	2.99
1995			
Governor	8	75	12.0
City Mayor	4	68	5.9
1998			
Governor	12	75	16.0
City Mayor	7	77	9.0
2001			
Governor	13	79	16.4
City Mayor	13	96	13.54

Table 2. Elected Women Municipal Mayors 1992, 1995, 1998

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. Elected</i>	<i>No. of LGUs Reporting</i>	<i>%</i>
1992	117	1,536	7.23
1995	125	1,536	8.14
1998	220	1,525	14.40

Using manual computations on the COMELEC list excluding ARMM, we counted 199 women LCEs. The large leaps in 1998, as shown in the table, when compared with the figures for Governors and Mayors, are attributed to the mandatory end-of-term of the LCEs. For 2001, there are even larger increases, as can be seen in Table 2; LCEs who won in 1992 had reached mandatory end-of-term in 2001.

Going back to our political experience, it is easy to see that the big increase in women's electoral participation is due to the fact that male LCEs made their wives or children run for office and that their substitutes won. Many members of the Lady Mayors Association call themselves "breakers," meaning, they ran to break the terms of their husbands (or fathers) so they (the husbands or fathers) could run again after three years. Of course, some of the male mayors won seats as Governors or

Congressmen, and their mayor spouses are able to sit longer than three years. But for many women mayors, like Makati's Elenita Binay, their term as accepted by them, is only three years.

We conducted two surveys of women LCEs: one in 1998 (covering those elected for 1995-1998), another in 2000 (covering those elected in 1998-2001). The 1998 survey covered 137 LCEs (eight Governors, four City Mayors, and 68 Municipal Mayors) while the 2000 survey included two Governors, five City Mayors, and 91 Municipal Mayors.

We asked how they entered politics. In 1998, 34 said they "come from a political family" while 30 said their husbands "come from a political family." In 2000, the number of respondents who said they belong "to a political family" was 51, and those whose husbands come "from a political family" numbered 54 (Tapales 1999, 2000; see Table 3).

Table 3. How Respondents Entered Politics, 1998-2000

<i>Manner of Entering Politics (Multiple Responses)</i>	<i>1998 n = 80</i>	<i>2000 n = 98</i>
1. I come from a political family.	34	51
2. My husband comes from a political family.	30	54
3. Our family is prominent in the area.	33	40
4. I was encouraged by friends and relatives.	39	56
5. I was drafted by my socio-civic organization.	27	32
6. I was drafted by the party.	41	50
7. I ran on my own.	7	8
8. Others.	9	15

Unlike President Aquino who never ran for public office before her husband died, 25 of the 80 respondents in 1998 had held elective posts before (from Congressman, Mayor, *Sanggunian* [local legislative body] member, or *Barangay* [lowest political unit] official), and ten of the 98 respondents in the 2000 survey did. The smaller number of those who held elected office before the 1998 elections (2000 survey) validates the earlier observation that many of the women LCEs were "breakers."

Nonetheless, even if they did not hold elective posts before, the women LCEs, coming from political families, had been expo. to the culture of politics as they grew up or as they spent years with their husband who had long been in politics. (See Table 4.)

Table 4. Positions/Occupations Held by Respondents Before Their Current Office, 1998, 2000 (Multiple Responses)

<i>Position / Occupation</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>2000</i>
1. Elective Position	25	10
Congressman	21	2
Local Legislator (Councilor, Provincial Board Member)	2	18
Mayor		1
Vice-Mayor/Vice-Governor		10
Barangay Official	2	9
2. National Government Agency Administrator	8	6
3. Local Government Appointive Official	-	15
4. School Administrator	6	10
5. Teacher/College Professor	11	25
6. Businesswoman		9
7. Private Practice of Profession	17	15
8. Nongovernment Organization (NGO) Leader	2	
9. Others (Housewife, student, etc.)	3	10
10. Appointed to elective Office	-	8
11. Other elective position (Constitutional Convention Delegate)		1

That kinship tie has been an important factor in politics, especially at the local level, is admitted by the female politicians themselves. In a television talk show, for example, Secretary Dick Gordon (then Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority Chairman), said he told his wife Katherine (incumbent Mayor of Olongapo) that, "in the beginning, the Gordon name would help you. Later, you will be on your own." As Mayor Mary Jane Ortega of San Fernando City who acknowledges her Ortega kins as Governor and Congressman said, "Kinship may be our entry into politics, but what matters is really what we do when we are in office." Both Gordon and Ortega have gone on to win awards for themselves and their cities.

Advocacy of Women's Programs

Our surveys showed, for the 1995 and 1998 winners, that projects conducted by the women LCEs are not really gender-tracked. Like typical male politicians, they considered the importance of conspicuous infrastructure projects. At the same time, however, the women LCEs

placed a high priority on health and nutrition (predominantly for women and children).

In 2001, we were part of a project providing a profile/directory for lady municipal mayors. In the profiles, we culled projects where they put priority. Environment, infrastructures, and health topped their list. In fact, many of the municipalities, where the women served, won awards for environment (Clean and Green); and a few on nutrition (Green Banner Award) and health (Health and Management Information System or HAMIS).

In their profiles, the women LCEs stressed the fact that their being women, especially their being mothers, gives them the sentiments to prioritize environment, health, and nutrition with infrastructure projects. These “feminine and maternal qualities” enable them to look after their localities with the perspective of a homemaker—cleanliness and beautification are for the household, while nutrition and health are for the family.

Advocacy of Women’s Welfare

However, Governors and Mayors do not have to be women in order to establish government offices catering specifically to women’s welfare. In many instances, in fact, such offices were established by male LCEs, although with the expected prodding of women grassroots leaders.

Probably the first such office catering to women was established in Bulacan in the early 1990s by then Governor Roberto Pagdanganan. The provincial office, aptly called *Tanggapang Panlalawigan para sa Kababaihan* (Provincial Government Office for Women), is closely linked to the Provincial Department of Social Services. It was followed by the City Gender Offices in Davao City, Angeles City, Balayan (Batangas), and most recently, in Quezon City and Marikina, which are the first two LGUs in Metro Manila to create Gender and Development (GAD) offices. Except for Marikina which has a woman Mayor (Marides Fernando), the rest have male LCEs. The Balayan office has in fact won a *Galing Pook* award because of its successful women-oriented projects.

The Balayan project won for its Integrated Gender-Sensitive Health Program. It provides health assistance, legal assistance, education and information dissemination, economic and livelihood assistance, legislative advocacy and research, and counseling for women under stressful circumstances (*Kaban Galing* 2002: 84-87).

Beyond these formally organized offices are efforts of the women themselves at the grassroots and those of other NGOs. In Irosin (Sorsogon), for example, community organizing of the major NGO, LIKAS (*Lingap sa Kalusugan ng Sambayanan*), has modules on gender sensitivity. Irosin women and men have impressed us with their gender sensitivity in our research forays in the municipality.

Barangay women in many parts of the country have also been involved in women-oriented livelihood projects as seen in Bulacan. Beyond mere livelihood, women-oriented NGOs have gone into projects involving assistance to victims of rape and domestic violence. Soroptomists International, the Women's Legal Bureau, the Women's Crisis Centers, are examples of those efforts. Women-oriented NGOs also pushed for the establishment of women's desks in police stations to assist female victims of violence. Former Vice-Mayor Charito Planas of Quezon City prides herself in the fact that she established the first city police women's desk.

There are indeed signs of growing awareness of engendering local governance.

Expanding Women Empowerment in the Communities

The preceding discussion points to efforts in engendering local governance. As signatory to UN conventions on women, the Philippine government has approached its compliance largely through legislation at the national level, which provides impetus for national agencies and local governments to follow.

Noteworthy laws on women are Republic Act (RA) 7192 or the Women in Development and Nation Building Act, which provides equal access of women to credit, military schools, and other areas of life; RA 7160 or the Local Government Code, which provides for women's sectoral representation in local legislative bodies and the GAD Budget that sets aside five percent of funds of government agencies to gender activities starting with the General Appropriations Act (RA 8250). However, only RA 7192 is fully implemented. The Local Government Code notwithstanding, Congress has not passed appropriation for sectoral elections. The GAD budget, for its part, is not uniformly implemented, especially at the local level.

A study by the Asia Foundation documents the extent of the GAD budget implementation at some LGUs (Budlender et al. 2002). In Angeles

City, for instance, despite a GAD budget ordinance and a GAD office, the absence of a GAD plan “provides the opportunity for some departments to assert that gender is not relevant in their work” (Budlender et al. 2002: 9). For its part, Bacolod City allows five percent of each department’s budget for gender development rather than five percent of the LGU budget as a whole (Budlender et al. 2002: 10). Nonetheless, in areas with little resources, gender programs are also conducted if the Mayor is supportive. The research discussed the active role of the male mayor of Surallah (South Cotabato) who has tapped other program sources to mainstream gender.

In local government experiences, what appears is the crucial role of civil society groups “in pushing for the integration of gender concerns in the budget process.” For instance, the cities of Angeles and Bacolod have “strong local women’s movements with dynamic NGO leaders,” who have successfully pushed gender-oriented programs.

What seems to be necessary ingredients in engendering governance are: (1) national policies which serve as impetus for implementation in the grassroots; (2) active and committed advocates at the local level; and (3) LCEs who are committed to gender concerns, be they female or male. The last one comes about not through orientation programs on gender for both male and female. There have been many of such in the last few years, but they are mostly attended by technical personnel.

Legislation is also an important factor in engendering local governance. The absence of sectoral representatives in the local councils may be a setback, but gender-sensitive legislators can still serve as policy advocates for greater gender equality. The GAD budget is only one mechanism. Within the local budget, gender equality may yet be achieved if the councilors, following the LCE’s initiatives, can consider gender equality as a main goal in budget legislation.

The electoral process is also crucial. Although the female mayors have shown themselves to be as capable as their male relatives, the engendering process requires opening up of the ranks of elected officials to those outside the political dynasties. That is, however, a problem that can only be solved by changes in the political socialization of the Filipinos.

Local governance in the Philippines is not fully engendered, but so also in the rest of the world. Nonetheless, the increasing number of women political officials, whether breakers or kins of politicians, is a matter of optimism. As they consider significant their roles as mothers in program priorities, they may be able to look more closely at the welfare of families, of women and children.

But, as so many cases in local government have shown, gender alone is not the way to engendered governance. Female and male local officials must all be aware of the need to redress inequalities among the genders through policy and action.

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