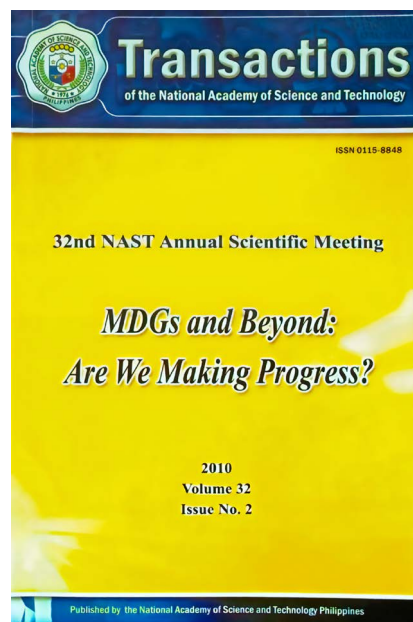


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MDG III: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women: An Assessment of Gains and Remaining Challenges

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MDG GOAL 3—PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN: AN ASSESSMENT OF GAINS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES¹

Carolyn I. Sobritchea, Ph.D.

1. Introduction

The Millennium Declaration was adopted in 2000 by 189 Member States of the United Nations in order to pursue a global approach to development. This document contains a set of eight inter-connected development goals and targets and is commonly referred to now as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).¹ “The Declaration resolved, among other things, to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty and stimulate development that is truly sustainable.”² Goal 3 of the MDG focuses on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. It has only one target which is to “eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education, no later than 2015.”³

The UN Millennium Task Force on Education and Gender Equality which was set up under the UN Millennium Project provided the operational framework for program development that covers three inter-related aspects or domains of gender equality. These are:

- **capabilities:** basic abilities as measured by education, health and nutrition. Capabilities are the means through which other forms of well-being can be accessed;
- **access to resources and opportunities:** equality of opportunity to use their capabilities through access to economic assets such as land or housing, resources such as income and employment, as well as political opportunity, such as representation in parliaments and other political bodies;

¹ These goals and targets were revised in 2007 to provide greater emphasis on meeting the challenges related to the attainment of peace, security, sustainable development, good governance and the promotion of human rights. The MDGs “represent a vision or aspiration at the global level, and are derived from the averages of long-term global trends (primarily during the 1970a and 1980a) project forward to 2015” (UNIFEM, 2008. *Making the MDGs Work for All: Gender-Responsive Rights-Based Approaches to the MDGs*. UNIFEM, Bangkok, page 2.

² UNIFEM, 2008. *Ibid, Report of the* page 1.

³ United Nations, 2007, *The Millenium Development Goals Report 2007*. New York.

- **security:** reduced vulnerability to violence and conflict, which cause physical and psychological harm and reduce the ability of individuals, households and communities to fulfill their potential. Gender-based violence against women and girls is often intended to keep them “in their place” through fear. ⁴

Indeed, equality between women and men has been a development goal of the United Nations since its establishment after the Second World War. The 1945 Preamble to the UN Charter reaffirms the “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations, large and small.” Over the last four decades, various UN bodies and multilateral development organizations have pursued strategic measures to eliminate various forms of discrimination against women that are rooted in age-old cultural traditions as well as in political and economic structures and processes. Women’s equal right to opportunities and benefits, as well as their right to freedom from harm and abuse like domestic battery, rape, female genital mutilation, child marriage and female infanticide are now fully recognized and enshrined in international and national legal instruments.

This paper discusses the progress thus far achieved by the Philippines in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women as indicated in Goal 3 of the MDG. It also underscores the remaining challenges to the full realization of this goal in the context of persistent and emerging socio-economic and political changes worldwide and locally.

II. Overview of Country Initiatives to Address Gender Equality Issues

Despite many economic and political constraints, the Philippines has pursued various gender equality programs in accordance with the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and following the action plans of the Women’s World Conferences in Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). CEDAW was ratified by the Philippine government in 1981 and presently signed also by 185 other countries. It consists of a preamble and thirty articles that call for the following State actions: (a) the incorporation of gender equality principles in the legal system; (b) repeal of all discriminatory laws and the passage of those that prohibit discrimination against women; and the (c) establishment

⁴ United Nations. 2001. *Report of the Secretary-General, Road Map Towards the Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit*, Fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, 6 September, Document A/56/326.

of mechanisms like tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the protection of women against discrimination.⁵

The 1987 amendments to the Philippine Constitution included provisions that underscore the country's recognition of the need to promote equality between the sexes, and to advance the rights of marginalized groups, especially ethnic minorities and the poor, to development and quality life.

In its capacity as a policy making body under the Office of the President, the Philippine Commission on Women (formerly the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW)⁶, was strengthened in the early eighties to address gender issues through policy as well as organizational and program development. Subsequently, it embarked on the process of integrating the Gender and Development (GAD) approach into government policies, plans, programs, and structures. To ensure the effective implementation of the Constitutional mandate of promoting gender equality, the PCW came out in 1994 with the 30-year Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD). The main thrust of this strategic gender plan is to eventually eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in Philippine society and enable them to actively participate in development.

The PCW is presently headed by a policy making body composed of 24 representatives from national line agencies (e.g., the DOH, DSWD, and DILG) and non-government organizations working in the areas of labor, media, youth, the peasants, the elderly and disabled, business, education, and indigenous communities. The active participation of women's groups and women's studies practitioners from the academe in policy making and program development functions of the Commission has been instrumental in making the bureaucracy more gender-responsive and sensitive to women's issues and concerns.

Over the past decades, the Philippine government has pursued the goal of gender equality by working in the 12 areas of concern embodied in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPA). These include, among other things, the promotion of women's economic empowerment, protection and fulfillment of women's human rights and promotion of gender-responsive governance.⁷ Analytical tools for program planning, implementing, monitoring and

⁵ Sobritchea, Carolyn, 2006. "Introduction: Advancing Women's Economic Rights through CEDAW," In *A Gender Review of Selected Economic Laws*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Center for Women's Studies, 1.

⁶ It was the first machinery for women to be established in Asia in 1975.

⁷ National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, 2001. *Framework Plan for Women*, 2001/2004, Manila

evaluation have been developed and widely disseminated to all government agencies. These are supplemented by guidelines for the preparation of gender plans and utilization of gender budgets. There has been continuous training as well of government officials and personnel in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government to ensure the gender responsiveness of their work.

The efforts of the executive branch of government to address the gender dimensions of economic, political and social issues in the country was supported by the passage of different enabling laws and policies. These include the Women and Nation Building Act (1994) which establishes the principles of women's participation in national development and those that protect women from rape, domestic abuse, sex slavery and labor trafficking. The Philippines is among the few countries in the world which requires the allocation of at least five percent of government agency funds to address gender issues. For women in the labor force, there are now laws that provide for credit to those engaged in micro and cottage industries and to guard against gender discrimination in the hiring and termination of employees. There is also the legislation establishing the family courts and the women's and child desks in all police stations that now expedite the resolution of cases involving abused women and children.

Box 1: Laws to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Human Right

- | | |
|--|--|
| RA 7192, “Women in Development and Nation Building Act of 1991” | The law provides equal opportunity to women in all military schools, equal rights in entering into contracts and loan agreements and in joining social and cultural clubs. |
| RA 7845, “General Appropriations Act of 1995” | The law provides that a certain percentage of the appropriations for government agencies be earmarked for gender and development |
| RA 7882, An Act Providing Assistance to Women Engaging in Micro and Cottage Business Enterprises, and for Other Purposes, 1995. | Provides assistance to women engaged or wanting to engage in micro and cottage industries. |
| RA 7941, “Party-List System Act of 1995” | The Act provides for the election of party-list representatives through the party-list system, including the women's sector. |
| RA 8171, “An Act Providing for the Repatriation of Filipino Women who have lost their Philippine Citizenship by Marriage to Aliens and of Natural-Born Filipinos, 1995.” | |

- RA 7877, "Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995"
The law declares sexual harassment in the employment, education or training environment as unlawful.
- RA 8353, "The Anti-Rape Law of 1997"
The law considers rape as a crime against persons and broadens the definition of rape to include sexual assault; it recognizes marital rape.
- RA 8505, "Rape Victim Assistance and Protection Act of 1998"
The law mandates the establishment of a rape crisis center in every province with counseling, free legal and other services for the victim.
- RA 8972, "Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000." The law provides for social development and welfare services for solo parents and their children.
- RA 9208, Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2003. The law aims to eliminate trafficking in persons especially women and children and to ensure their recovery, rehabilitation and integration into the mainstream of society.
- RA 9262, "The Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004"
The law protects women against intimate partner abuse' accepts the "battered women syndrome" as valid defense in court and provides for temporary and permanent protection orders at the barangay level.
- RA 9710 "Magna Carta of Women. This law provides a comprehensive definition of gender-based discrimination and enumerates all the human rights that women should enjoy as provided for by existing international covenants ratified by the Philippine government, by the constitution and by national laws.

The passage of the aforementioned laws has paved the way for the creation of various programs and services to support the needs of women. There are presently crisis counseling services, temporary shelters, one-stop shop medico-legal facilities, and women's desks at police stations to attend to the needs of victims of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Lately, both government and non-government organizations have also stepped up their efforts to provide especially poor women with skills to improve their income-earning capacity (e.g., through micro-finance and micro-enterprise programs) and medical and health services (e.g., primary health care, health and social insurance schemes, day care centers). In response to the

challenges posed by women's entry into the labor force, various government agencies have introduced policies and programs to harmonize parenting and home care roles with paid work.

The Magna Carta of Women which was signed into law late last year, provides the most powerful legal instrument for the realization of MDG Goal 3. It provides a comprehensive definition of discrimination that can be used to amend the discriminatory provisions of existing laws and improve the implementation of programs and services in the country.

Academics in Women's/Gender Studies, for their part, have tried to influence their schools to institute gender studies programs, establish services to address gender/women's issues in education, and produce a new generation of non-sexist literature for use in teaching, policy advocacy, and research. The Women's Studies Association of the Philippines, a national organization of feminist scholars and women's studies faculty, presently coordinates the production of feminist literature and the provision of technical assistance in gender training and research for government and civil society groups. In 2002, the Association had 64 institutional (i.e., colleges and universities) and more than 300 individual members.⁸ Its membership has gradually increased since then with the participation of more schools from regions in the Visayas and Mindanao. At present, nearly all public tertiary schools have their respective gender-related research and teaching programs, as required by the government's gender budget policy

Among the notable programs of the Department of Education to address school-related gender concerns are the integration of gender-responsive curricular reforms in the 2002 Restructured Basic Education Curriculum and in the Alternative Learning Systems. The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) has instituted proactive measures to encourage women to enroll in traditionally male-dominated technology courses. It set up the *Kasanayan-Kabuhayan-One-Stop Shop* to address the needs of displaced women workers and women in the informal sector.⁹

In the 2008 Gender Gap Index Report prepared by the World Economic Forum, the Philippines placed 6th among 130 countries. This was the same rank the country had in 2007 and 2006. This survey is based on the

⁸ Sobritchea, Carolyn. 2003. "The Second Wave of the Women's Movement in the Philippines and the Politics of Critical Collaboration with the State." Paper presented at the Workshop on Civil Society in Southeast Asia, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 12-13 November

⁹ National Economic Development Authority, 2005. *Second Philippines Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals*. Page 13. Manila,

“innovative new methodology introduced in 2006 and includes detailed profiles that provide insight into the economic, legal and social aspects of the gender gap in each country. The Report measures the size of the gender gap in four critical areas of inequality between men and women such as economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment and health and survival.” The Philippines is one of two countries in Asia to have closed the gender gap on both education and health and is one of only eleven in the world to have done so.¹⁰

II. Indicators and Data to Assess the Attainment of the MDG Goal 3

What do current statistics tell us about the extent to which the Philippines has achieved the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women?

“The government recognizes that gender equality has many dimensions, extending beyond education participation rates of men and women “¹¹. As such it had added other indicators to assess the progress made in achieving Goal 3 of the MDG. These include among others, access to employment and other economic opportunities as well as representation of the sexes in decision making or leadership positions.

Set Indicator 1: Female and male school participation rates

Over the last decade, there has been a marked improvement in the school participation rates of females compared to males across the three levels of education and based on such indicators as simple literacy rate, functional literacy rate, enrollment figures, cohort survival rate, completion rate and number of graduates in higher education. Table 1 below, shows, for instance female adult literacy rate of women was 95.7 percent in 2004 compared to 92 percent in 1990. The males had a lower rate increase of 94.4 percent in 2004 compared to 93.1 percent in 1990.

¹⁰ “Philippines keeps gender equality ranking.”
<http://www.gmanews.tv/story/133067/Philippines-keeps-gender-equality-ranking>.
 Accessed June 5, 2010.

¹¹ National Economic Development Authority. 2007. *Philippines Midterm Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals*. Manila, page 31.

Table 1. Changing Status of Filipino Females and Males

Indicators	1990	2000	2003	2004	2005
Life Expectancy at birth					
Male	-	-	67.2	67.5	65.0
Female			70.5	72.8	71.0
Adult Literacy Rate					
Male	93.1	92.5	92.5	94.4	-
Female	92.0	95.7	93.9	95.7	-
Net Enrollment ration					
In Primary school					
Male	-	92.1	113.0 (2002)	-	-
Females		93.3	112.0 (2002)	-	-
In Secondary Schools					
Males		48.0		-	-
Females		53.5			

Source: ASEAN Statistical Pocketbook, 2006. <http://www.asean.org/13100.htm>

Additional data on the school participation rates of females and males show the following:¹²

- **Girls fared slightly better in terms of enrolment indicators in elementary and secondary education.** At the public elementary level during the school year 2006-2007, female Net Enrollment Ratio (NER) was 76.90 percent while male NER was at 75.28 percent. This means that there were around 23 in every 100 girls and 25 in every 100 boys aged 6 to 11 who did not go to school in that period. In High School, 50 in every 100 girls and 59 in every 100 boys aged 12-15 years old did not enroll in the same school year;
- **The NER in the public secondary level during the same school year was lower compared to elementary level.** However, there was a higher rate of female enrollment in secondary education compared to males. Female NER was 49.58 percent (50 in every 100 girls while male NER was 41.34 percent (41 in every 100 boys) aged 12 to 15 years. There was greater disparity between girls and boys in high school at 1.20 GPI which is equivalent to 120 girls in every 100 boys.

¹² These figures were taken from the unpublished report to the CEDAW Committee of the Philippine Commission on Women, June 30, 2010.

- **The completion rates for SY 2006-2007 indicated that more girls were able to complete the prescribed number of years in both elementary and secondary education.** The completion rate of females at the elementary level was 67.35 percent (67 in every 100 girls), while male completion rate was 58.79 percent (59 in every 100 boys) with 1.15 GPI (115 girls in every 100 boys). The completion rate of females in the secondary level is higher at 61.87 percent (62 in every 100 girls) compared to that of males at 48.39 percent (48 in every 100 boys) with greater gender disparity at 1.28 GPI or equivalent to 128 girls per 100 boys.
- **The average dropout rate (ADR) at the elementary level was lower for female at 0.93 percent compared to male ADR at 1.57 percent.** This means that only one in every 100 girls and two in every 100 boys failed to finish the school year 2006-2007. The GPI is computed at 0.59 which implies that only 59 girls for every 100 boys dropped out in that period.
- **There was also a slightly higher participation rate of females in Muslim and slightly higher participation rates for males in indigenous communities.** For the school year 2006-2007, the recorded number of enrollees in Madrasah elementary schools reached a total of 240,072 students. It accounted for only 2 percent of the total enrollment for that period. Females were recorded at 126,213 (52.57%) while males at 113,859 (47.43%). The recorded number of high school students in Madrasahs was even lower at 34,241 with females accounting for 57.24 percent with males at 42.76 percent. For the same school year, the number of students in the elementary level who belonged to the indigenous communities was 337,616 or barely 3 percent of the total enrolment in the elementary level. Females were a bit less than males at 167,610 (49.65%). High school records showed a total of 86,771 students from the indigenous peoples, of which 53.76 percent (46,644) were females.
- **In tertiary schools, the female enrollment rate during the SY 2005-2006 was 54.48 percent compared to the 45.5 percent of males.**
- **The gap in women's participation across various professional fields has narrowed as well in recent years.** Women are better represented now in professions that used to be male-dominated like agriculture, engineering and law. Males, on the other hand, are increasingly entering what used to be female-dominated professions like health service and teaching. Among the 263,634 graduates for school year 2005-2006, female graduates accounted for 56.61 percent (149,246) while males accounted for 43.39 percent (114,388). Business Administration and Related Disciplines produced 48,369 (18.35%) female graduates while Medical and Allied Discipline

produced 37,371 (14.18%) female graduates. Education and Teacher Training which came third produced 24,523 (9.30%) female graduates. In 2006, the percentage of licensed professional women was higher at 57.72 percent than male licensed professional (40,922 vs. 63,547). Among the 63,574 women professionals, Nurses accounted for the highest percentage at 43.27 percent (27,495), followed by Professional Teachers-Elementary Level at 43 percent. The gains from the foregoing initiatives are encouraging. For instance, there has been an increase over the years in the number of females in education.

As regards the causative factors of dropping out in selected schools across the country, Abuso (2007) found out that a negative attitude toward schooling or low motivation is a reason specific to boys for not attending classes. Lack of personal interest is the number one reason why boys drop out from school, while it is the high cost of education for girls.¹³

Indicator 2: Equal access to employment opportunities

While the educational status of Filipino women has improved in recent years, this has not immediately translated into a better access for them of employment opportunities. For example, while the October 2008 Labor Force Survey (LFS) showed a slight increase in the Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for both sexes, the rate for females was only at 48.6 percent (from 48.2 % in 2007), compared to the male rate of 78.9 percent (from 78.3% in 2007). The numbers of employed and unemployed Filipinos in October 2008 were estimated at 34.5 million and 2.5 million, respectively. Female employment was estimated at 13.3 million compare to 21.3 million males.

- **Nonetheless, female unemployment rate for the same year was relatively lower at 6.5 percent which is equivalent to 929 thousand compared to male at 7.0 percent which is estimated at 1.6 million.**

- Not all employed women and men were paid. There is, in fact, an increasing trend of unpaid workers over the past years. In October 2006, unpaid family workers in own family business or enterprise were estimated at 4.3 million in the agriculture, industry and services sectors from 3.7 million in 2003. Of the total figures, 2.4 million (55.8%) were unpaid women workers while only 1.9 million (44.2%) were unpaid male workers. A large fraction of the unpaid workers, both women and men, were laborers and unskilled workers (78.4%)

¹³ Maligalig, Dalisay S., Rhona B. Caoli-Rodriguez, Arturo Martinez, Jr., and Sining Cuevas. 2010. Education Outcomes in the Philippines. ADB Economics Working Paper Series No. 199.

in the agriculture sector (73.7%).

- Gender tracking in employment shows that Filipino women still dominate occupation groups that may be considered as extensions of their reproductive roles at home such as office management and professional services while men are still largely located in mechanized and heavy industries. Filipino men are likely to be wage-and-salary and own-account workers and Filipino women are likely to be unpaid family workers. In 2004, 56 percent of unpaid family workers were women, while 64 percent of wage and salary workers and 67 percent of own-account workers were men. Among the employed women, however, 50 percent were wage and salary workers, 33 percent were either own-account workers (or self-employed or employec), and 17 percent were unpaid family workers.

- There is almost an equal level of participation between women and men in overseas work but the context of their participation is very much different. In 2004, women accounted for 51 percent of the total number of overseas Filipino workers (OFW) yet their average monthly cash remittance represented only 57 percent of the PhP 74,267 average monthly cash remittance of Filipino men. This is because Filipino women are likely to end up in jobs that are low-paying and often unprotected. The 2004 survey showed that half (55.8%) of the women who went abroad for work were laborers and unskilled workers, while 27.7 percent of their male counterparts worked in trade and related work and 26.9 percent worked as plant and machine operators/assemblers.

Indicator 3: Equality in access to decision-making positions

Again, significant improvement in female access to education seems to have a minimal effect on the extent of their participation in top-level decision-making roles, both in politics and governance. Filipino women were given suffrage and the right to run for public office in 1939. In the last 64 years, however, very few women (i.e., an annual average of 10 % of all elective posts) won in elections and assumed key leadership roles in the government's judiciary and executive branches.¹⁴

In 2007, females occupied only 21 percent of the 240 seats in the House of Congress; 29 percent of all positions in the first and second level courts and 5 out of 15 seats in the Supreme Court.¹⁵ It must be noted, however, that the middle level positions—the technical teams operating the

¹⁴ Silvestre, 2001. *Filipino Women in Politics*. Unpublished report. UNDP. Page 2.

¹⁵ National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. 2008. NCRFW Factsheet, accessed 7 March 2008

bureaucracy—are composed of highly educated women; they occupy 74 percent of all second-level career service positions.¹⁶

There are slightly more females (58 percent of the 2.32 million employees) working in the executive branch of government. They dominate the technical or second-level positions while the men are either in skilled (e.g., clerk, driver) or in managerial/executive posts.¹⁷

III. Persistent and Emerging Challenges to the Full Attainment of MDG 3

The foregoing data clearly underscore the tremendous progress that the Philippines has achieved in promoting the status and welfare of Filipino women. Nonetheless, these gains are likely to be wasted unless there is continuous effort to address the economic and socio-cultural roots of discrimination. Patriarchal beliefs and practices, rigid structures of class and ethnic inequality, and the many destabilizing effects of globalization pose serious challenges to the full attainment of MDG 3. The serious challenges at present include the continuous decline in school participation rate especially of males at all school levels, the persistent male-centered political culture, lack of policies and programs to protect women from reproductive health risks and vulnerabilities and the prevalence of gender-based violence across classes and ethno-linguistic groups.

Male-centered political culture

Various cultural, political, and economic factors—both personal and structural in nature—continue to impede Filipino women’s full and meaningful participation in politics and governance. Among these factors are the persistence of sexist beliefs and practices in both the domestic and public spheres, a male-centered (“macho”) political culture, women’s lack of skills and motivation to assume leadership roles, and inadequate support to enable them to enter politics and effectively perform their work. Then there are the real and imagined differences and tensions within and among the hundreds of civil society groups and dozens of issue-based coalitions. Very often, these differences get in the way of influencing political parties and the electorates to advance women’s political and economic interests.

Beyond the issue of female representation in decision-making is the bigger problem of engaging Philippine politics to respond to women’s needs

¹⁶ National Statistics and Coordination Board, 2004,
<http://www.nscb.gov.ph/stats/wmfact.asp>

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

and interests. As past experiences show, increasing female representation in public leadership may not directly and immediately help promote women's concerns. Women leaders have to be sensitized and encouraged to put on the gender lens, so to speak, and in so doing use their power and influence to support pro-women policies, mechanisms, and programs.

Domestic Violence and Other Forms of Abuse Against Women and Children.

Inequality in decision making between women and men may be seen as both the cause and effect of the prevalence of gender-based violence in Philippine society. Its most common forms are wife battering, rape, sexual molestation, sex trafficking and economic neglect.¹⁸ Records of the Philippine National Police show that wife battering was the most prevalent form of abuse against women from 1999-2006, accounting for more than half (58.5%) of all reported cases. This is followed by cases of rape (14.7%) and acts of lasciviousness (9.4%).¹⁹ The 2008 Gender Assessment Report of donor agencies notes that there were 9,197 reported cases of child abuse in 2005, and 7,606 cases in 2006. Seventy percent of the victims were girls and 40 percent were cases of sexual abuse (rape, incest and acts of lasciviousness) as well as sexual exploitation (child prostitution, pedophilia, and pornography).²⁰

It is worth noting that the number of reported cases of abuse against women and children has declined over the past eight years. However, the Philippine Commission on Women claims that such a trend does not imply a decrease of cases. It is more likely the result of under-reporting due to ineffective documentation processes and mechanisms, and the lack of access of victims to enabling legal and social support and information. Many victims, especially young females, are afraid to report the crime because of shame and fear of retaliation by the offender who may be the father, brother or spouse. Therefore, it is most likely that the actual incidence of violence against women and children is far higher than what the records show.

¹⁸ Pascual, Salvacion Baaco, Precilla D. Tulipat and Ma. Salome C. Ujano . 2005. *Beijing+10: Celebrating gains, facing New Challenges: A Report of the Philippine NGO*. Quezon City: Women's Studies Association of the Philippines, United Nations Population Fund, and the Social Watch, Philippines.

¹⁹ National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. 2008. NCRFW Fact Sheet , March, 2008, <http://www.ncrfw.gov.ph>.

²⁰ Asian Development Bank, Canadian International Development Agency, European Commission, National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, United Nation's Children Fund, United Nations Development Fund for Women, United Nations Population Fund. 2008. *Paradoxes and Promise in the Philippines: A Joint Country Gender Assessment*. Metro Manila. Page 77.

The effects of physical and sexual abuse especially on children are often serious and detrimental to their physical, intellectual and emotional health. Studies show that young victims either drop out from school or are unable to perform their studies well; they are prone to physical and emotional ailments and cannot often relate well with friends and peers. Children who witnessed abuse in the household are likely to become abusers themselves later in life.²¹ Mothers who experience physical and emotional abuse, on the other hand, are often unable to take care of their children and effectively perform their social and economic roles. They are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, eating problems, sexual dysfunction, and reproductive health problems like unwanted pregnancy, miscarriage, and even HIV infection.²²

Lack of Access to Reproductive Health Information and Services.

An equally serious problem, especially of poor women in the Philippines, is their lack of access to reproductive health information and services. Poverty combined with such factors as poor health-seeking behavior of both women and men, and inadequate government health services account for the slow decline of maternal mortality rates and emergency obstetric cases. They are also responsible for the slow but steady increase in the incidence of HIV infection in the country.

Despite the country's adherence, therefore, to the Millennium Development Goals of improving maternal health through reduction of maternal mortality ratio, to reduce child mortality rate and to halt the spread of HIV infection, very little progress has been attained to realize these goals. The repeated failure of the legislative branch of government to enact the Reproductive Health bill has remained a major barrier to the full and regular access, especially of the poor, to contraceptives and family planning information and services.

Frequent and many pregnancies and childbirth have a negative impact not only on women's health but also on the chances of survival of their offspring. They increase the risks of maternal mortality and childbirth complications. At present, maternal deaths in the country make up 14 percent

²¹ Sobritchea, Carolyn. 1995. "A Review of Conceptual Frameworks and Studies on Family Violence," *In Breaking the Silence: The Realities of Family Violence in the Philippines and Recommendations for Change*. Metro Manila: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UP Center for Women's Studies Foundation, page 71.

²² Pascual, Salvacion Baaco Prescilla D. Tulipat and Ma. Salome C. Ujano. 2005. *Ibid*.

of all deaths among women aged 15-49. The data show that 25 percent of maternal deaths were caused by hypertension (13%), post partum hemorrhage (8%) and complications of unsafe abortion (4%) while the rest is simply classified as “other complications”.²³ Moreover, a study revealed that although considered illegal in the Philippines, there were 430,000 induced abortions in 2000.²⁴

The comparative data on population characteristics of Southeast Asian countries in Table 2 show that the Philippines continue to lag behind Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam and Thailand in reducing mortality risks due to maternal causes and infant mortality rate. The maternal mortality ratio has declined very slowly (1.4%) since the 1990s, “when the Philippines was listed among the 42 countries contributing to 90 percent of maternal deaths worldwide”.²⁵ To achieve the Millennium Development Goal target of 52 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015, the Joint Gender Country Assessment report argues that the Philippines must reduce its maternal mortality ratio by at least 7 percent annually.²⁶

²³ Cabigon, J., G. Estrada-Claudio, M. Festin, J. Melgar, Z. Recidoro, J. Tan, and Z. Zablan. *Population, Health and Gender in the MDGs: An Independent Appraisal of the Philippine Performance*. p.6 in: Dr. Tan, *Accelerating the Response to MDG 5: Reduction of Maternal Mortality Report*, 2007.

²⁴ Juarez, F., S. Singh et al..2005. “ The Incidence of Induced Abortion in the Philippines: Current Level and Recent Trends,” *International Family Planning Perspective*. Volume 31, No. 3, pages 140-149.

²⁵ Asian Development Bank, Canadian International Development Agency, European Commission, United Nation's Children's Fund, United Nations Development Fund for Women and United Nations Population Fund. 2008. *Paradox and Promise in the Philippines: A Joint Country Gender Assessment*. Metro Manila, page 58.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Table 2. Population Characteristics of Southeast Asian Countries

Country	Population Mid-2008 (millions)	Births per 100,000 population	Infant Mortality Rate	Female Lifetime Risk of Dying from Maternal Causes	Total Fertility Rate	% of Population Under-nourished 2002-2004
Brunei	0.4	19	7	2,900	2.0	4
Cambodia	14.7	26	67	48	3.5	33
Indonesia	239.9	21	34	97	2.6	6
Laos	5.9	34	70	33	4.5	19
Malaysia	27.7	21	9	500	2.6	3
Myanmar	49.2	19	70	110	2.2	5
Philippines	90.5	26	25	140	3.3	18
Singapore	4.8	11	2.4	6,200	1.4	-
Thailand	66.1	13	16	500	1.6	22
Timor-Leste	1.1	42	88	35	6.7	9
Vietnam	86.2	17	16	280	2.1	16

Source: Population Reference Bureau. 2008 World Population Data Sheet.

The 2003 National Demographic and Health Survey found that 61 percent of currently married women do not want additional children and their desired fertility rate is only 2.5 children, one child less than the current total fertility rate of 3.5 children. Moreover, the proportion of unwanted births increased from 18 percent in 1998 to 20 percent in 2003. The 2004 Pulse Asia Survey likewise showed that 97 percent of all Filipinos believe that it is important to have the ability to control one's fertility or plan one's family. Most of the survey respondents (82%) are Roman Catholics. What these data suggest, therefore, is that Filipinos generally favor their full access to information and services that can promote reproductive health.

Other than the problem of maternal and infant mortality are the equally serious problems of unwanted and early pregnancy, closely spaced pregnancies, unsafe termination of pregnancy and abortion complications. Coupled with these problems is the inability of the service providers to give appropriate and adequate sexuality and reproductive health information to male and female adolescents. Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to maternal death. Young mothers especially from poor families often give up their schooling, thereby, limiting their opportunities for regular and higher paid jobs.

The results of the 2002 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Survey indicated that a substantial number of young people which accounted for 18.2 million or one-fifth of the national population, were sexually active. Girls and boys had their sexual debut at the average age of 18.2 and 18.9, respectively. The survey noted that early sexual activity of young people is strongly associated with their poor access to reproductive health information and services.

The resistance of certain sectors, particularly of some faith-based organizations, to institutionalize and vigorously pursue sexuality education in the country and provide modern family planning services especially to the poor will not prevent young people from being sexually active. On the contrary, it will put them at greater risk of having unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortion.

Indeed, all these issues, if not decisively resolved by the government, will continue to pose serious threats to women's health. Such problems will continue to hamper their capacity to perform various domestic, economic and social roles and responsibilities. As previously mentioned, women who have control over their fertility and who decide on the size of their family, are better able to attend to their own personal well-being as well as to the needs of their children and other family members.

The slow but steady increase of reported cases of HIV infection in the Philippines in recent years should be examined for its gender dimensions. Although the Philippines is a low-HIV prevalence country, with less than 0.1 percent of the population estimated to be infected with the virus, questions about the current manner of collecting and reporting incidences of infection, raise some doubts about the accuracy of the data. The HIV/AIDS Registry of the Department of Health showed that from 1984 to December 2007, there were 3,061 reported cases of HIV infection. Of this number, 2,279 were asymptomatic or in a stage of chronic infection and 782 were full-blown AIDS resulting in 307 recorded deaths since 1984. Heterosexual intercourse accounted for the majority (61%) of recorded cases, with men more infected (66.4%) than women (33.54%). Data for June, 2010 showed a 173 percent increase in reported cases of HIV sero-positive individuals compared to the same period in 2009. Of the 109 cases for the month of June alone, 18 were detected through voluntary counseling; 90 percent were males while 60 percent were from the National Capital Region.²⁷

²⁷ Department of Health Website, http://www.doh.gov.ph/files/NEC_HIV_June-AIDSrsg2010.pdf; accessed September 1, 2010.

Male role in promoting the reproductive health of their sexual partner is important to prevent and control the spread of HIV/AIDS. However, Filipino men are more frequently engaged in sexually risky behavior than women²⁸ and resistant to the use of condoms both for family planning reasons or to prevent sexually transmitted infections. Only 9 percent of contraceptive use is male-dependent, with condom use accounting for only 1.6 percent, vasectomy, 0.1 percent and withdrawal 7.3 percent.²⁹ Epidemiological and cultural factors put women at greater risks of being infected. Females, particularly those of adolescent ages, are biologically more vulnerable to HIV because of their immature cervix and thinner mucous membrane, which get abraded during forced or dry intercourse. Their reproductive organ has a greater surface area of mucous membrane where the virus can enter. Then the semen of HIV-positive men contains a higher concentration of the virus than the vaginal fluids of HIV-positive women. Cultural and economic factors likewise combine and expose women to untreated STIs, thereby, increasing their risk of being infected by 10 times more.³⁰

The progression from being HIV-positive to having AIDS is faster for girls compared to males in many South and Southeast Asian countries because of the higher incidence of malnutrition among females that results in the weakening of the immune system. Gender norms and cultural practices like greater public tolerance of male infidelity in marriage or involvement in multiple sexual partners, regardless of civil status, also predispose females to STIs, including HIV infection.

IV. Conclusion

The full attainment of MDG 3 will depend on the extent to which the Philippine government, in collaboration with various stakeholders, will be able to resolve the gender issues that impede the capacity of females to ably perform their roles and responsibilities to their families and to their communities. While enabling laws and programs are now in place, there is a need to fully enforce and implement them.

²⁸ Singh S. et.al. 2006. *Unintended Pregnancy and Induced Abortion in the Philippines: Causes and Consequences*. New York:Guttmacher Institute.

²⁹ Clark, Jr. Sam, J. Flavier, P. Ramos-Jimenez, R,B, Lcc, and H. Solomon. 2005. *Assessing the Status of Male Involvement in Family Planning in the Philippines*. Manila. USAID. http://philippines.usaid.gov/documents/ophn/male_involve.pdf (accessed October 3, 2008).

³⁰ World Health Organization. 2003. *Gender and HIV/AIDS*.

Given the multiple roles that women now assume both in the private and public spheres, it is important to continue the current efforts of advocating for the equal sharing of power, duties and responsibilities over child care and the management as well as utilization of family/household resources and opportunities. The schools must continue to remove all forms of sexism in their curricular programs and student assessment policies and promote a learning environment free from the risks of sexual harassment, physical violence and other forms of abuse. Sexuality education must be seriously and effectively integrated into curricular programs at all school levels and adapted to the needs and learning capacities of children and adolescents.

The prevalence of domestic violence, sex trafficking and sexual abuse especially of young females and even males, are very serious problems. There is a need for concerted efforts to eliminate them in order to ensure the emotional and physical well-being of Filipino children. But the elimination of gender discrimination must go hand in hand with measures to reduce the incidence of poverty in the country. This can be achieved through the vigorous promotion of viable income-generating opportunities, especially in the rural areas. These opportunities should be geared to women who, because of lack of work in the country, have to seek employment abroad as domestic helpers and care-givers.

Inasmuch as the gender issues mentioned here disproportionately affect poor women, current policies and programs to eliminate poverty must adopt gender-responsive and rights-based strategies. The United Nations Development Fund for Women strongly advocates for the integration of gender equality targets in all of the eight Millennium Development Goals. It proposes that in order for countries like the Philippines to halve between 1990 to 2015, the number of poor people, there is a need to adopt the following measures: (a) make macroeconomic policies pro-poor, gender-responsive and rights-based, (b) improve the gender-responsiveness of poverty statistics, (c) invest in time saving infrastructure, especially in rural areas and poor communities, (d) increase women's access to paid employment; (e) increase women's access to land, credit and other resources, and (f) enhance women's capacity to participate in decision-making, governance and development work.³¹ To reach the MDG goals of reducing maternal mortality by three quarters and child mortality by two-thirds in 2015, UNIFEM proposes the greater involvement of men and communities in health education on pregnancy and childbirth and improved access of women to transportation, infrastructure and communications. It also calls on

³¹ United Nations Development Fund for Women. 2008. *Making the MDGs Work for All: Gender-Responsive Rights-based Approaches to MDGs*. New York.

government to provide free and easily accessible reproductive health services especially to poor women.

Finally, the lower rates of school enrolment and completion of males have to be addressed immediately. More studies have to be conducted to understand the causes of this problem. The findings of these studies can help examine the contents especially of elementary and secondary school curricula. One of the reasons cited here for the low school completion rate of boys is their lack of motivation and interest in school activities. Such finding should require a close examination of current pedagogical practices. Perhaps, school activities and learning methodologies can be reformed to ensure that boys and girls as well, are inspired to pursue their education.

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