



Doc. 7

Working paper for the 31th Study Session of the International Institute of  
Differing Civilizations - Brussels 17-20 Sept. 1958.  
(Non-corrected proof)

## The Role of Women in the Development of the Philippines \*

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The women of the Philippines participate actively in the development of their country. There are two main reasons for this, first, because they have always been free and respected, never having had to put up with social restrictions such as purdah, crippling of feet, polygamy, or subjection to husband or to male members of their family; and second, because they are accustomed to work really hard to help support their families for, although the country is rich in natural resources, nearly one-half of its population is still illiterate and ignorant and is suffering from lack of technically trained manpower.

Centuries before Spain conquered the country in 1521, foreign visitors, mostly traders, had written accounts of their observations which showed that the women enjoyed high social esteem and leadership. There were even women rulers of note mentioned. These statements were corroborated by early Spanish conquerors and missionaries; but when the Spanish rule and laws were established, the women's rights were curtailed to the level of those of the Spanish women then. Soon, however, they gained leadership in a new field. Quick to recognize their latent ability, the Spanish friars made use of them in the propagation of the Catholic Faith. This is still the practise to day, with fund raising for charity and civic work thrown in.

There is a phase of the Philippine way of life that must be taken account of to appreciate fully the part of women in nation building. It is the custom for the husband to turn over his entire earnings to his wife and receive from her his daily expenses including his transportation. This practise has tremendous effects upon family relations and national economy. The women are practically lord and master in matters of purchases for family needs, their children's education, and the acquisition of personal effects such as jewels. The husband

consults his wife on almost any endeavor he undertakes, cannot alienate or sell real property without her consent and has no say over paraphernal properties. There is no divorce, only legal separation.

### Women in Philippine Economy

The total population of the country is about 22 million. Of this number, approximately 14.5 million are 10 years and above composed of 7.1 million males and 7.4 million females. The women outnumber the men; but, of the 8.3 million persons engaged in gainful occupations, only 3 million or about 36% are women. Some 1.3 million women are in agricultural pursuits and 1.7 million are in non-agricultural industries. In agriculture, there are 3 women workers to every five men workers whereas, in non-agricultural work, the women predominate 5 to 1.

In non-agricultural industries, the women are engaged in manufacturing, commerce and domestic services. In manufacturing they make up 66% and the men 34%. This is attributed to their proficiency in handwork such as embroidery, dressmaking, arts, crafts and the production of cigars, cigarettes, drugs, and cosmetics.

Commerce is another field dominated by women, numerically speaking. Of 782 thousand persons engaged in this area, some 463 thousand or 59% are women. The markets, the sari-sari stores (grocery stores usually at street corners), sidewalk stalls, and money-lending at home are, almost exclusively, in the hands of women. In their hands also are pawnshops, jewelry stores, some of them the largest in the country.

Statistics reveal that many women workers receive no pay. Of 3 million women employed, 0.5% are employers, 31.9% are self-employed, 23.8% are wage and salary earners, and 42.4% unpaid family workers. Of the 1.3 million women in agricultural employment, 79% are unpaid workers while 13% of the 1.7 million in non-agricultural occupations receive no remuneration. These facts are indicative of the existence and extent of family owned farms and industrial firms which the unpaid women on record are helping to operate.

The ascent of women to top positions has been steady, although slow, since World War II. Statistics show that there are some 197,000 women managers, administrators and officials, which number is 6.6% of all women employed. Of professionals, technical and related workers, about 93,000 have been registered.

The Constitution provides, "The state shall afford protection to





labor specially to women and children". In implementation thereof, there are in the statute books laws providing maternity leaves with pay, equal pay for equal work, minimum wages, overtime pay, protection of women's health, social securities benefits — in fact all the modern laws that the world can think of on behalf of working women. Now there are employers who discriminate against women because, they claim, it is relatively costly to employ them; but the women are in the labor unions. By the way, of some 2,000 unions in the country, 54, with about 5,000 members, are headed by women. Some of the unions led by women are stevedoring unions. Of 4 major movie firms, 3 are directed by women. Here they are not helping only the national economy and employment. They are incidentally helping the government develop the national language.

While there is still very much to be desired as to the influence of women in management and policy making in the economic field, the part they play in the lower brackets certainly means much both to the family and the national purse. In view of the expanded and intensified program of the government in the industrialization of the country, the corresponding efforts to develop trained manpower and the eagerness of the women to upgrade their competence, it is safe to predict that their contribution to the country's economic wellbeing will increase every year, particularly in home industries and cooperatives. The 2.2 million housewives not included in the productive force discussed above will be involved in these two activities.

## Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

### Women in the Government Service

All positions in the government are open equally to men and women. The American Administration established at the turn of the century was founded on the principles of equality and free education. The women were quick to take advantage of their new opportunities and began taking jobs, first as teachers and then they spread out to other fields. The last six decades witnessed unprecedented advancement of women in all phases of the national life. Of 278,000 people in the employ of the government, 74,000 or 26.61 % are women.

It is still in the field of teaching that they contribute the most to the welfare of the nation. According to the Statistical Bulletin of the Bureau of Public Schools, 1956, there are 68,385 women teachers, or about 68 %, out of a total of 101,321. In the primary grades, the women predominate almost 77 % or 45,639 strong against 14,072 males. Of the critic teachers of the nation 80.61 % are

women. Among intermediate teachers, supervisors of training departments, secondary school teachers and teachers-nurses, percentage of women are 56.86 %, 62.5 %, 60.65 % and 88.25 %, respectively. And their proportion in numerical terms is not too bad either in other areas viz., collegiate classroom teachers, 40.33 %, elementary school principals, 21.25 %, secondary school principals, 10.88 %, and division supervisors, 41.21 %. There are 8 women Superintendents of Schools.

During elections public school teachers act as poll clerks, inspectors and canvassers. The persons assigned to these delicate posts are 67 % women. This is significant since these assignments require integrity and a strong unbiased character.

In the elementary and high schools of the private schools, there are 14,354 women and 10,553 men teachers, or a ratio of 57 % women to 42.36 % men. However, this proportion is reversed as to professors at universities and colleges where there are 60.61 % men to 39.38 % women.

Although women are comparatively few in the policy making and administrative bracket, their predominance in the elementary grades gives them the enviable premier position in the development of the nation. Their work involves the basic education of the people which is the foundation of programs for advancement, be it social, political, economic, cultural or spiritual. Without adequate universal elementary education inculcated by devoted, well trained teachers, no nation can hope to bloom into full freedom and progress.

Many women are doing their bit in high positions in the government. Among them are : 1 member of Cabinet, the Social Welfare Administrator; 3 judges of Court of First Instance; 1 Commissioner of the Workmen's Compensation Commission, 8 School Superintendents; 7 Foreign Affairs Officers, including 2 Consuls; 2 Fiscals; 2 Assistant Solicitors General; 21 Justices of the Peace; 432 Elementary School Principals; 77 Critic Teachers; 41 High School Principals; 40 District Supervisors; 162 Division Supervisors and Heads of Departments of Vocational Schools; 3 Directors of Hospitals; 2 Members of Import Control; 2 chiefs of Divisions, Central Bank; 1 member of Board of Pardon and Parole; 1 member of National Economic Council; 1 member of the Textbook Board; 2 members, Board of National Education; 1 Chairman, Unesco National Commission; 1 member, Jose Rizal National Centennial Commission; 1 Chairman, National Rural Resettlement Administration; 1 Commissioner, Land Tenure Administration; 1 member, Integrity Board; 1 Chairman,





National Apprenticeship Council; 1 member, Board of Directors, People's Homesite and Housing Corporation.

For members of official delegations to inter-governmental conferences, 1 woman each for the Unesco General Conferences, except the Eighth to which 3 were sent, and the Ninth which was attended by 2. A woman was appointed Chairman of the Philippine Delegation to the Unesco General Conference in 1952; and one was sent to ILO Conference in Geneva in 1951, while two attended two separate International Bureau of Education-Unesco Conferences. Several other women represented the Philippines at regional conferences. These women sent abroad enhanced their understanding of local problems by seeing the common programs being undertaken for building lasting peace through advancement of human welfare.

### Women in the professions

The women are active in the professions. Many are engaged in private practice. Of the 62,804 registered professionals, 31,858 are women. The percentage of women among the different professions is as follows : Midwives 100 %; Nurses 91 %; Pharmacists 83 %; Dentists 35 %; Optometrists 19 %; Physicians 16 %; Chemists 15 %; Certified Public Accountants 14.7 %.

The following shows the number of women professionals registered: Certified Public Accountants 662; Architects 61; Chemical Engineers 96; Chemists 301; Chemical Technicians 3; Civil Engineers 24; Dentists 2,608; Assistant Electrical Engineer 1; Nurses 10,543; Optometrists 204; Pharmacists 10,001; Physicians 2,282; Midwives 4,255; Private Land Surveyor 1; Lawyers 1,006; total 31,858.

Most of these professional women have either organized themselves into professional groups or have joined with men in their respective careers. There is, for example, the dynamic Philippine Association of University Women, the Philippine Women's Medical Association and the Filipino Nurses Association. Through their organizations, the professional women enhance the impact of their profession and their professional qualification.

### Women in politics

As already mentioned, women have access to all positions in the government. This is so in all elective posts. Their strength in politics had long been felt before they won the ballot in 1937. It manifested itself when the Constitution of the Commonwealth required, as a condition for the grant of woman suffrage, 300,000 affirmatives votes in a national plebiscite of women. As usual they



marshalled their forces so effectively that on plebiscite day they cast no less than 447,725 yes votes! On the occasion of their victory, President Quezon remarked that the women had for many years profoundly influenced Philippine politics for the better.

The following data show the sustained interest of women in politics :

REGISTERED VOTERS				VOTING AND PERCENTAGE			
Year	Total	Male	Female	Male	%	Female	%
1946 .....	2,898,604	1,850,432	1,048,172				
1947 .....	4,320,671	2,634,164	1,599,364	2,030,605	77.08	1,233,818	77.14
1949 .....	5,231,224	3,195,596	1,940,218	2,255,482	70.84	1,324,435	68.70
1951 .....	4,754,307	2,848,736	1,905,571	2,620,807	91.99	1,770,302	92.90
1953 .....	5,585,492	3,322,346	2,272,539	2,578,037	77.59	1,761,643	77.51

In 1955, 6,487,061 voters were registered of which 77.37% constituted male voters who cast their ballots and 78.38% female voters who cast theirs. In 1957, there were 5,113,858 registered voters of which 2,893,727 were women.

It is interesting to note the consistent strength of the distaff voting power. Since 1941 when the first woman was elected to the House of Representatives, there has been but one woman member of this important 102-member Chamber of the National Legislature. The same is the case in the Senate. Since the first woman Senator was elected in 1947, there has been only 1 woman to 23 men in this Chamber.

No woman has as yet been elected Provincial Governor or City Mayor. At present there are 10 women of the 1,078 Municipal Mayors, some of whom are doing outstanding performance, and 22 women out of 1,077 Vice-Mayors. There are 336 women Municipal Councilors. It sounds substantial for municipal legislative bodies; but it is not, for there are a total of 6,468 municipal councilors all over the country.

Considering that they constitute approximately one-half of the population and have consistently maintained the same proportion in the voting strength of the nation; and considering further their remarkable achievements during the last 2 1/2 decades particularly in education, culture, business, social welfare and professions, the



women's representation in elective positions is pitifully slight. Their voice seems faint where decisions are made for the destiny of the nation. One reason for this is the reluctance of men to yield their seats to women; next, there are thousands of younger men who are eager to get in; third, the customary reluctance of husbands to allow their wives to dabble in politics; and fourth, the reluctance of the women themselves to stand for election because they do not want to sacrifice the rearing of their children and the care of their homes, which is the source of the remarkable solidarity of the Philippine family.

What they lack in number in elective positions, the women make up during electoral campaigns. There is where their voice is heard. For due to their persuasiveness and diplomacy and their patience and persistence on the platform and specially in house-to-house campaign, they affect substantially the political climate of the nation. As a matter of fact, all political parties have well organized national women's auxiliaries and have women on their platform committees and national directorates. They exert efforts to include women in their slates to attract the woman vote.

On their part, the few elected women officials make up for their small number by doing their utmost in the performance of their duties. By and large, they have contributed to the advancement of sanitation, health, education, social welfare and culture.

## Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

### **Women in Non-Governmental Organizations**

Not many nations can equal the Philippines in women's action. The Filipino women's first experience in group activity was their participation in the overthrow of the Spanish rule. This fighting spirit extended to the resistance against the American occupation; but once they were convinced that the new master was sincere and just, they took to the field for the "Pacification Campaign". Since then on, they have been conspicuous in organized action against successive national problems such as epidemics, infant mortality, prenatal and child care, sale of Liberty Loans (World War I) fight for women's and children's rights and others too long to enumerate.

The extreme cruelty of the Japanese war of occupation made the women see more than ever the need of coordinated action among them. During the war, what men could be spared from military duty joined the underground or went to the mountains to help there and to keep away from danger of death in the hands of the enemy.

The women remained to work to support the children, to supply food, information and medicines to the guerrillas, or to help in the relief work and serve in the hospitals. It was the hardest test for them. They had hardly any food, and the climb to the mountains to deliver supplies in the darkness of the night was dangerous and exhausting.

During the Liberation, their work was no less arduous due to relief and reconstruction. According to "Philippine Social Trends" published in 1950 by the President's Action Committee on Social Amelioration, there were a total of 978,964 widows, out of which were 326,964 war widows. Of these 223,083 were childless, leaving 750,881 widows with 1,593,408 dependent children to support. Considering the moral and physical breakdown at the time and the frustrate state of the nation, one can only wonder how the women and women's organizations managed, as they did, to help substantially in pulling the country out of its desperate situation.

Added to the women's volunteer burden were : other orphans and other dependents for whom the government could not afford to provide. There were all in all 1,900,808 such dependents, composed of 104,104 complete orphans, 796,704 orphans whose fathers were killed, and 1,000,000 aged dependents.

The seriousness of the situation drew the women together. They formed work groups to help the government and the communities to come to life again. The oldest, largest and best known among women's organizations is the 53-year old National Federation of Women's Clubs. It was active during the war and led work during the reconstruction period. It has clubs in nearly every town, with a total membership of about 800,000 women. It maintains nursery classes for working mothers and indigent children, has a continuing long-range program of adult education and community development and holds biennial conventions aside from regular seminars for its members and regional service. It is affiliated to the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

The Civic Assembly of Women was organized in 1947 to galvanize woman power for vigorous volunteer services during the reconstruction period. Today it has 41 affiliate women and girls associations, 17 of which are affiliated to corresponding international organizations; holds yearly general conferences on Independence Day, and works through a national Council. To show the scope and relevance of its work to national problems, its annual subject for discussion is given here : 1947 — Filipino Women United for Nation Building;





1948 - Filipino Women United for Peace; 1949 - Women in Public Affairs; 1950 - Women United for National Economy; 1951 - Analyzing Ourselves; 1952 - What the Women Can Do for Agricultural and Industrial Progress; 1953 - Women United for Rural Progress; 1954 - Safeguards for Nationalism; 1955 - What of the Future of Employed Women for Filipino Home Life, for Community Development; 1956 - Ten Years of United Efforts; 1957 - Eleven Years of United Efforts. This organization is now and then invited by the President of the Republic for consultation.

Women are also active in mixed organizations, such as the Red Cross, Tuberculosis Society, Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, World Brotherhood, National Historical Society, Philippine Association of Universities and Colleges, etc.

Many of the women's organizations and mixed groups to which they belong are affiliated with international organizations. Many of the local members have attended numerous international organizations or gone abroad on study grants. These helped them see greater opportunities for service at home. One Filipino woman has been elected member of the Executive Board of Unesco International, and many have been elected to important posts in directorates of international non-governmental organizations or invited to speak or write professional papers for international conferences. Many women writers are helping in dissemination of information and in fostering cultural improvement.

At present, the women of the Philippines are evaluating the effects of women who work upon the family, which to them is first and foremost. They have already taken steps to fortify the safeguards for family solidarity. The Catholic Faith, which is the dominant religion, has provided them the firm anchor for their sustained efforts to keep the family embedded upon the principles of Democracy. They are no longer fighting to enhance their rights and opportunities, for these they have already. They are working to enlist more women in public service, to increase further women's participation in the development of the nation. Actually, they believe they can double, or treble even, the impact of their participation in community and national development.

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