

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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Philippine Studies vol. 27, no. 2 (1979) 198–209

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

**Constraints to Rural Women's Participation
in Philippine Development: A Report
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JEANNE FRANCES I. ILLO

The development process is a progressive widening of options for people. The fresh set of alternative covers, among other things, better as well as more food; durable, semidurable, or makeshift houses; cheaper and more producer and consumer goods. For married women, the options include wider market, social, and political participation in addition to home management. The process is, thus, seen to create opportunities for people to decide coherently from among the available alternatives.

Participation in development can be active or passive. Making development happen is active participation. Waiting for it to happen, or tolerating without directly feeding it, is passive involvement. Thus, when farmers shift from traditional to higher yielding varieties, they are considered as active development participants. When women accept the viability of expanding their roles beyond those of mother and wife, and act accordingly, they become partners in progress. Similarly when men recognize that they need not be bound by traditional expectations in sharing work and responsibilities at home and in society with women, and, as a result, consider women as their peers, these men are considered to be promoting development.

SOCIAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

Not everyone, however, has been and can be active participants. In fact, very few are. A large majority are at the mercy of struc-

This article is a revised version of a paper read during the session, "Women and Development," at the Tenth Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, 10–21 December 1978, New Delhi, India. The data used were collected by the author while heading the Social Survey Research unit of the Institute of Philippine Culture and working on her USAID-funded study on the women in the Bicol River Basin (Camarines Sur, Philippines) between September 1976 and January 1977.

tural and social pressures. In the rural Philippines, separation of male and female functions persists although an increasing change of heart is evident, particularly among the younger residents. Men reign supreme outside the home; the home, on the other hand, is the women's domain. While working women are generally tolerated, a significant number of rural Filipinos – more among men than among women – still contend that men are the breadwinners, and that the woman's place is the home.¹

Moreover, widespread sex-based typology of activities persists. Women may participate in religious, civic, and similar community organizations and functions. There is, however, less approval of female involvement in political affairs. Empirical investigations on the extent of the "femininity" of organizations and activities reveal that religious affairs are "feminine"; political affairs, "masculine." While more women than men are members of religious groups and participate in religious activities, in political functions, men are more visible.²

Apart from these social and cultural considerations, certain characteristics of rural rice farming communities in the Philippines tend to inhibit more meaningful female participation in the economy. First, the system of land tenure and tenancy, the agrarian reform program notwithstanding, limits access to land as a productive resource to a small segment of the agricultural household population. Coupled with the present population pressure, this gives rise to an ever-growing landless laboring class in the countryside, particularly among the rural female.

Second, rice farming is seasonal, particularly in the areas where irrigation facilities are not available. The level of demand for labor is seldom maintained throughout the year. Efforts to mechanize farm activities further reduce the labor absorption capacity of farms, the activities mechanized being those which are highly labor-intensive. Farm mechanization, however, differentially af-

1. Jeanne F. Ilo, "Involvement by Choice: The Role of Women in Development." A final report submitted to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID Manila). (Quezon City: Social Survey Research unit, Institute of Philippine Culture, 1977).

2. In the five municipalities and one city studied in the province of Camarines Sur, only 4 percent of the 25 poblacion and 119 barrio *barangay* (councils) have a female *barangay* captain; 19 percent of the 137 *barangay* councilmen in the poblaciones are women but this drops to 15 percent of the 693 barrio *barangay* councilmen. The membership of the *sangguniang bayan* (municipal council) in these communities is also male-dominated, 98 out of 107 members being male.

fects male and female labor. For instance, the substitution of tractors for man-animal labor has adversely affected male labor employment. On the other hand, mechanical harvestors and threshers have especially displaced women labor since harvesting and threshing are traditionally dominated by female sharecroppers.

Third, the farmer's wife and daughters are mainly employed as unpaid family labor to assist in seedbed preparation, application of fertilizers and chemicals, and similar farm tasks. They also take charge of food preparation for the hired laborers especially where the hiring arrangement stipulates free meals during the work-period. Except in farming households headed by a widow without an adult son, the woman serves merely as an extra hand on the farm. Although she may bring farm land into the marriage, it is her husband who manages it in addition to his own. Nonetheless, in many farming families the woman has acted as the contact with the market, purchasing fertilizers and chemicals at the beginning of the crop year, and, after the harvest, marketing the surplus product.

Fourth, outside of rice farming, female workers tend to be limited to domestic service in some rich households in the town or the nearest city, to weaving mats and hats, cultivating a small garden for home and/or market, raising poultry or livestock, or operating a *sari-sari* (variety) store. The last two enterprises, however, discriminate against those who do not possess sufficient capital to underwrite such activities. Thus, women of little means are forced into low productivity employment. To earn a hundred pesos in one month might entail working long hours in various income-generating enterprises. While higher-paying jobs may be available in the *poblacion* (town center), rural women do not possess the skills required for these jobs. Moreover, the absorption capacity of town employment is also limited.

IN OR OUT: MICRO-LEVEL DECISIONMAKING

Somehow cognizant of the restrictions imposed by the system of which she is a part, the rural woman presumably undergoes consciously or unconsciously a process of evaluating her courses of action. Her problems, however, revolve around her household; their immediate resolution in her goal. How she decides to solve

her concerns defines her participation in the development process. The succeeding sections will discuss the concerns of rural married women in a southern province of Luzon, Camarines Sur, a framework for explaining participation in development, and how the concerns enter the participation framework.

MAJOR CONCERNS

People's concerns are those matters that continuously engage their attention and interest and can affect their sense of well-being and happiness. Concerns relate to the people's felt needs and are traceable to values.³

A study of married women was conducted in the province of Camarines Sur in 1977. The raw data used were replies to a series of perceived quality-of-life (PQL) questions. The PQL approach assumes that people are involved in two processes: first an evaluation of events occurring in a specific role situation, according to a set of values and producing an affective response; second, integration of these affective responses which results in a general affective evaluation for that role situation, and combinations of these responses across different role situations thus producing a global response to life-as-a-whole.⁴

The different life domains, role situations, and values were identified in a series of interviews of a panel of key informants in 1974, and another in 1976. Open-ended questions on what constitutes happiness, good (or bad) fortune, success, self-fulfillment, and the like, were asked of the 1974 informants. From these, 10 items were identified: education, family, primary group, household possessions, wealth, job, income, position in the community, food and drink, and health. Added to this list, which was tested with a predominantly male sample surveyed in April 1974, were five more taken from findings of similar studies: furniture/

3. Frank Lynch et al., "Let My People Lead: Rationale and Outline of a People-centered Assistance Program for the Bicol River Basin," mimeographed. (Quezon City: Social Survey Research unit Institute of Philippine Culture, 1976).

4. Frank M. Andrews and Stephen B. Whitey, "Developing Measures of Perceived Life Quality: Results from Several National Surveys," *Social Indicators Research* 1, 1 (1974): 1-26.

possessions, current prices, participation in formal and informal organizations.⁵

The interviews conducted in September–October 1976 with married and nonmarried men and women as informants brought out additional pertinent life domains for married women: their own income as well as household income, participation in household decision making, family size, time allocation, child rearing practices, and woman-spouse relationship. In all, the 1976 study on women covered 20 life domains.

Concerning each of these life domains questions were put to the respondents in this manner: “All things considered, how do you feel about (MENTION LIFE CONCERN) – are you happy, unhappy, or somewhere in between?” Respondents were shown a seven-point scale and asked to indicate where they would place themselves: at the “very happy” and (score 1), at the “very unhappy” end (score 7), or at some intermediate point.

From this research seven major life domains of rural married women emerged. These are: (1) child rearing and marital relationship; (2) house and home; (3) housekeeping; (4) social benefits and family health; (5) education; (6) good provider; and (7) social participation, status, and esteem.⁶

The seven value factors seem to reflect two basic Filipino values, economic security – consisting of house and home, social benefits and family health, and the good provider factor – and social acceptance – education, child rearing and marital relationship, housekeeping, and social participation, status, and esteem.⁷ Being a woman in Filipino society means that her prestige lies mainly in her credible performance as mother, wife, and home manager. Although she might be a success in her profession or career, her “failure” as mother or wife is given a greater weight. An often heard comment runs this way: *Ano man kun abogada o doktora siya, dai man niya asekasong an saiyang pamilya* (What does

5. See Rodolfo A. Bulatao, “Measures of Happiness among Manila Residents,” *Philippine Sociological Review* 21 (1973): 229–38; Andrews and Whitey, “Developing Measures”; and Angus Campbell et al., “Monitoring the Quality of American Life,” mimeographed (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Institute of Social Research, University of Michigan, 1972).

6. Jeanne F. Illo and Robert C. Salazar, “Priorities in the Life of Bicol Women,” *Philippine Sociological Review* (forthcoming).

7. Frank Lynch, “Social Acceptance Reconsidered,” in *Four Readings on Philippine Values*, IPC Papers no. 2 (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1973).

it profit her if she is a lawyer or doctor if she cannot take care of her family?).

Further analyses of the seven basic concerns of Camarines Sur rural married women allowed for the identification of their concern priorities. A simultaneous consideration of feelings over a particular life domain and the marginal effect this domain has on the women's overall sense of well-being can help indicate which life area is of higher, and which is of lower, priority. Hence, a strong overall life correlate which is at the same time evaluated by the women as an "unhappy" area is considered a first-priority item. House and home is one example. One's own education, and social benefits and family health are additional immediate concerns.

The second-priority set consists of life areas which have minimal incremental effect on overall life satisfaction. Moreover, women did not appear to be dissatisfied with these life areas — housekeeping, good provider, and social participation, status, and esteem comprise this lower-priority set. The main components of the housekeeping factor are her feelings over time allocation and over the food she prepares for the family. She seems relatively unhappy over her time spent in housekeeping chores (ranked 14 out of 20 in a declining order of happiness). Home production time ranges between 41 (urban) and 48 (rural) hours per week, with the former accounting for 44 percent of average household weekly home production time; the latter, 61 percent. The decline in home production time as we move from countryside to city appears to be accompanied by a rise in satisfaction.⁸ The rural female dissatisfaction over her housekeeping involvement might have stemmed from the long hours she spends in domestic activities, the relatively large share of the housekeeping thrust upon her, and/or the paucity of household assets (and, therefore, cruder household technology) to make housekeeping less tedious.

Child rearing and marital relationship provides an interesting case. Although this factor was found to be a significant determinant of overall well-being, women were also found to be fairly

8. While PQL for time allocation is 2.60 in urban areas, the average PQL score for rural areas is 3.24, the difference between the mean scores being significant at .001 level (see Jeanne F. Ilo, "Involvement by Choice: The Role of Women in Development," mimeographed (Quezon City: SSRU Institute of Philippine Culture, 1977).

content with the status quo. As such, this concern qualifies as a low-priority area.

Compared with the major values elicited from the predominantly male sample studied in 1974, the following observation is, I think, salient.⁹ While a man's overall well-being is primarily affected by his feeling regarding his efficiency as household economic provider, a woman's life, on the other hand, is primarily governed by her concern for adequate household income and assets. Probably because the husband's earnings make up a considerable portion of household income, both come out as important life correlates of adult males in Camarines Sur. Among women, however, only household income seems to be crucial, her job-and-income factor explaining a very minimal percentage of the variance observed in overall life satisfaction. This seems to emphasize the dominant sex roles within marriage: husband as family provider; woman, family manager.

**TIME ALLOCATION USING DECISION CRITERIA:
A FRAMEWORK FOR FEMALE PARTICIPATION**

Development has usually been pared down to increasing efficiency or productivity. This relates to the avowed goals of making life more livable: basic needs sufficiently met, nonbasic demands progressively satisfied, poverty averted, and income and wealth distribution improved. Basically, freedom from want obtains, and freedom to choose is guaranteed. However, more narrowly considered, development spells surplus and markets. Understood as such, participation in development correlates with involvement in market activities.

Market participation constitutes but one of the alternative activities open to either man or woman. But while the man is forced to work, the woman is less pressured except under situations to be spelled out later. Whether the woman works or not forms part of her time allocation problem.

The woman, or anyone for that matter, has three broad ways of using her time, seen here as a productive resource. The choices

9. Frank Lynch and Robert C. Salazar, *Happiness starts with a Good Job and a Good Home - So Say the People of the Bicol River Basin*, SSRU Research Report Series No. 12 (Naga City, Camarines Sur; Social Survey Research Unit, Ateneo de Naga, 1974).

are home production, market participation, and leisure. While the first two pertain to the generation of consumer goods for the household (home production) or mobilization of resources to gain access to market goods (market participation), leisure, for its part, covers involvement in politics, religious and social functions, and recreational activities. Confronted with this set of competing activities, the woman then decides on the "package" of activities that will yield the household and herself the greatest satisfaction.¹⁰

The decision-making process appears to follow certain norms. These norms or decision criteria are assumed to be ordered from the most important to the least important. The decision maker then seeks to maximize her preference function on the most important criterion. If more than one alternative is "satisfactory" on this basis, the alternatives are then compared under the second most important criterion, and so forth.¹¹

The decision norms which, to my mind, bear on the rural married women are economic security (or survival) and reasonable family management. The latter subsumes the concern for the health of the family members, food preparation, child care, and time available for general housekeeping. Operationally, the two criteria may be translated into a family income threshold (for economic security) and minimum expected home production time (for family management).

My preliminary data collected in 1976-77 suggest the following decision-making pattern. Uppermost in the minds of women (and men) in the study area has been economic security. In most cases, it is physical survival. Resource allocation constitutes the major area for combatting hunger and keeping a roof over their head. Labor is the only substantial productive input they possess. This provides the primary vehicle for the production of household goods and access to market goods and services as well. In this connection, allocation of time among the members of the household gains ascendancy over other matters. Even in the case of

10. Gary S. Becker, "A Theory of the Allocation of Time," *Economic Journal* 75 (September 1965): 493-517; and Reuben Gronau, *Leisure, Home Production and Work: The Theory of the Allocation of Time Revisited*, NBER Working Paper Series No. 137 (California: Center for Economic Analysis of Human Behavior and Social Institutions, National Bureau of Economic Research, 1976), among others.

11. See Peter C. Fishburn, "Lexicographic Orders, Utilities and Decision Rules: A Survey," *Management Science* 20 (1974): 1442-72; and Jose Encarnacion, Jr., "A Note on Lexicographical Preference," *Econometrica* 32 (1964): 215-19.

women whose general expectations dictate specialization in home production, the concern for the household's survival override societal considerations. Thus, the woman distributing her time among the different competing activities aims to bring the family income to some targeted level. Results of national surveys tend to support this as women, when asked why they work or are planning to work, report their desire to supplement their husband's income.¹² It is interesting to note at this point, that in the case of married women, the income being maximized is not necessarily their *own* income per se as it is the family (total) income. This being so, women belonging to families with income falling below a certain level continuously try to put in more market hours in order to maintain the household's income. Encarnacion also hypothesizes this pattern of choice-making as related to female market participation.¹³ Upper-class (or not so poor) women, on the other hand, are less constrained by the family-income maximization rule.

However, once the desired family income level is attained, a second-priority decision rule is likely to apply. That is to say, once the immediate danger of deprivation is arrested, women contemplating the various uses of their time become responsive or sensitive to other factors. Because upper-class women are, by definition, untouched by the fear of hunger or material deprivation, they become more vulnerable to social expectations. It is among them that the second decision criterion is hypothesized to apply.

Given the value attached to a woman's keeping to the house and turning out the necessary goods and services for her family, it is possible that there exists some desirable (minimum) home production time which society expects from a married woman. Indeed, it may not be incorrect to say that before a woman can ever think of working, she first has to make sure that she invests some time at home supervising, if not actually in performing, her housekeeping and maternal work. It seems that familial and social sanctions operate to enforce such an expectation among married

12. Emma Porio et al., *The Filipino Family, Community, and Nation*, IPC Papers no. 12 (Quezon City: Institute of Philippine Culture, 1978; and Social Science Laboratory, *Stereotype, Status, and Satisfaction: The Filipina among Filipinos* (Quezon City: Department of Sociology, University of the Philippines, 1977).

13. Jose Encarnacion, Jr., "Family Income, Educational Level, Labor Force Participation and Fertility," *Philippine Economic Journal* 12 (1973): 536-49.

women contemplating employment in economic activities and among those already working as well.

Poorer women, however, are less bound by the minimum home-production norm since the overriding concern is the family's survival, a problem generally considered as more basic than this second norm. Moreover, the lower-class woman who works to augment her husband's income is admired, yet also pitied for her stoicism in the midst of poverty. If any stigma is involved in connection with her working, it invariably falls on her husband whose "duty" it is to support her and their children. It is clear then why many husbands object to their wives working when his income seems high enough to support her in the manner she desires.

COPING STRATEGIES OF RURAL WORKING WOMEN IN THE PHILIPPINES

Given the type of work available in the rural Philippines – mostly low-paying seasonal farm employment, among others – the working mother seeks the assistance of her kin to help care for her young children. What is probably more correct is to say that she turns to her neighbors who, in a small community, are bound to be related to her or her husband. They would probably be asked to cook the children's food, too. The woman, however, is still left with the washing, cleaning, and similar household tasks, in addition to cooking the morning and evening meals. What appears to be important is for her to work whenever work is available; house-keeping concerns will eventually be resolved anyway after the income-earning activities are over. When a woman concentrates on market work within her community, she invariably works intermittently and for low wages or low profits. Operating a sari-sari store is an example. Looking for work outside the community has in some cases been tried. Here the problem of getting people to look after the children regularly arises. The possibility of domestic help is usually discarded: the house is too small, the resources too meager to share with another person. Again, the woman looks toward her relatives.

Upper-class women, be they in the rural or urban areas, resort to hired help to cope with their housekeeping obligations. To substitute for their presence at home, they hire *yayas* (nurse-maids)

to see to the needs of the children while they are working, and one or two general helpers. This is particularly true among career women and those involved in community affairs. Where such help is not available, they also turn to their relatives. They ask one of them to stay with the family, and receive free board and lodging. When younger relatives do come and stay, they are usually sent to high school where they can get a secondary education chargeable to the rich family with whom they are living. In these various ways working and socially active married women are relieved of most of their obligations while they are engaged in work, career, or extra-home commitments.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The following conclusions suggest themselves. First, rural women, together with their menfolk, face a common constraint which is primarily structural. Jobs are scarce; those which are available are generally low in productivity. If farms turn to mechanization of some of the farm activities, jobs will be scarcer. The mitigating factor lies in the increasing number of major crops cultivated — from one to two crops per year or even, if possible, five in two years. This, however, is largely dependent on the availability of irrigation water. More importantly, the establishment of labor intensive agribusiness enterprises would seem necessary. It is, of course, assumed that these newly created jobs will pay higher than the existing farm jobs. Since the absorption capacity of these agribusiness firms is also limited, the farms need not fear competition. If indeed surplus labor exists in the countryside of less developed countries like the Philippines, then productivity of labor in the farm and nonfarm sectors will be enhanced. A word of caution is probably in order. The new employment opportunities should cater to both men and women, but not exclusively men or women alone. It pays to remember, of course, that men, more than women, are pressured to support the family. Reversing the pattern (women, breadwinner; men, house managers) will prove painful to men, women, and their family and marriage, unless it is demonstrated that such arrangements can work without either sex being scorned by their society.

Second, apart from the constraints faced by men and women of the rural areas in the Philippines, participation of rural women

is influenced further by the social (and economic) class to which they belong. Lower-class women simply have to work virtually on any job available; upper-class women on the other hand, are socially required to fulfill some desirable minimum home production time lest they are censured by society for renegeing on their principal duties as mother and wife. While the latter group may be assisted by substitute domestic help in their home production tasks or by technological improvements (e.g., machines to shorten the time requirement for washing, cooking, and cleaning), the lower-class women face more severe problems. They have to work but can only do so when there is an opportunity. Even when they do work, they are paid poorly. Although the pressure on them to produce home goods slackens, they are nonetheless victims of their own expectations that as mother and wife they must still cook, wash, clean the house, and take care of the children properly. Work sharing at home with their husbands has always been practiced, but significantly only in the realm of child care. In the other time-intensive tasks, the woman is invariably left alone, although older children may help out. Otherwise, she plays the dual role of housekeeper and outside worker.

If, as argued earlier, development pertains to the widening of options for people, then lower-class women should not be permitted to suffer from a no-choice position of having to work. A woman who works because she derives pleasure from it is qualitatively different from one who works because she has to. With poverty checked, women can enjoy the "luxury" of deciding whether they want to work or not. Liberation here means being freed from the burden of "forced labor." If, indeed, the opportunity cost of staying at home is increased (i.e., wages are increased dramatically commensurate to their productivity), then I do not see any problem with the second step of liberation, which is the development of women beyond traditional roles. Only with the initial liberation, however, is the second step possible. Market participation as index of development participation should, therefore, be understood in this context.