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**WOMEN, BUREAUCRACY AND THE GOVERNANCE OF POVERTY IN SOUTHEAST
ASIA:
INTEGRATING GENDER AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN POVERTY
REDUCTION PROGRAMS IN THE PHILIPPINES AND VIETNAM**

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Introduction

The centrality of gender, participation and governance issues in sustainable poverty reduction have long been recognized by some international development agencies such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). However, these issues still tend to be treated separately, and it was only in recent years that some attempts have been made, particularly on the part of Management Development and Governance Division of the UNDP, to connect gender, poverty, and governance issues as its contribution to the Beijing +5 initiatives. As Sally Baden notes, "The current literature on governance tends to conflate goals, and assume positive links between, on the one hand, governance and poverty reduction and, on the other, between poverty reduction and gender disadvantage." (Baden 1999: 27)

Gender and poverty linkages have been re-examined in light of the so-called "feminization of poverty" trend. The "feminization of poverty" could imply any of the following trends. First, that there are a greater number of women who are poorer than men. Second, that the severity or degree of poverty experienced by women is worse than men's. Third, that there is an increasing trend of more women falling below the poverty line because of increased number of female heads of households, etc. The social relations of gender have been pointed out to mediate the differential experience and impacts of poverty on women and men's lives. Governance and gender linkages have also been articulated mainly, in urban poverty reduction, particularly in the effective delivery of social services and mechanisms of urban administration. Meanwhile, participatory research and development tools identified with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), have been used in poverty assessments to aid poverty reduction efforts. Governance and participation linkages are clearly made in attempts to conceptualize "participatory governance" as "the missing link in poverty reduction" (Schneider 1997), as well as in the use of participatory development tools in organizational capacity-building and improvement of local governance. Gender issues however tend to be glossed over in participatory development initiatives when trainers and project planners ignore the social differences and inequalities arising from gender, class, ethnicity, and other factors (Guijt and Kaul 1997, Angeles 2000b).

The relationship between gender planning, good governance, and poverty reduction efforts in Southeast Asian states is explored in this study, using Vietnam and the Philippines as case studies for the period 1986 to 1998. It examines a relatively unexplored question on women and change in comparative Southeast Asian studies: How do state bureaucracies that operate in different political, and ideological environment integrate women and gender considerations in their official plans and programs for poverty reduction? In turn, how do women relate to bureaucratic politics when state bureaucracies do (or do not) target them as beneficiaries of poverty reduction policies and programs? This paper mainly outlines some of the general issues and comparative insights at the level of national state bureaucracies emerging from a much larger research that explores more systematically the differences and similarities in the way state bureaucracies in Vietnam and the Philippines implement poverty reduction programs and plans.

Three sets of research questions that are addressed in the larger project relate to the processes and strategies, as well as the substance and outcomes, and women's responses to these, of the integration of gender issues in poverty alleviation:

A. Processes and Strategies: (1) In what institutions or bureaucratic locations in Vietnam and the Philippines do women's programs on poverty reduction exist? (2) What authority do these women's programs command, what power do they have at their disposal and what resources do they control? How do bureaucracies tap the existing social capital in the local communities and use synergistic efforts by aligning with other government units, women's groups, universities, etc.? What strategies do they use to encourage women's participation and get the support of women's organizations? (3) What are the orientations, types, approaches and priorities of such programs? What measurements or indicators do bureaucracies use in integrating women and gender in their programs? (4) Do political orientation and policy environments matter in official planning for women? How is this validated in the comparative analysis of the processes and strategies of gender planning in the Philippines and Vietnam?

B. Substance and Outcomes: (1) What outcomes or results are produced by the integration of women and gender concerns in local poverty reduction programs of the state? How are these outcomes measured, monitored and evaluated? (2) How are the outcomes of state-organised poverty reduction efforts affected by market reforms, for example, the decollectivisation of agriculture and emergence of private enterprises in Vietnam, and structural adjustment in the Philippines? (3) What combination of ideological inspiration, policy orientation, and bureaucratic practices produce outcomes which address women's practical (access-related) and strategic (empowerment-related) gender needs? (4) Are these countries affected by the observed shift in development discourse from "integrating women" to mainstreaming gender? And if so, what outcomes have been produced by such shift?

C. Women's Responses: (1) How do organised women, respond to the state's call for the integration of women in development planning in general and in poverty reduction programs in particular? How do they respond to the above strategies and approaches used by state bureaucracies to enlist their participation and support? (2) What strategies do women used vis-à-vis state bureaucracies? How do they tap the existing social capital to produce outcomes similar to or different from those desired by bureaucracies? (3) How do organised women respond to the outcomes of bureaucratic attempts to alleviate poverty? How did they respond to the shift in discourse and policy emphasis from the "integration of women" to the "integration of gender"? To what extent are policy networks, government bureaucracies and women's organizations in the Philippines and Vietnam affected by this shift? Are there differences and similarities in the way organised women in each of these countries respond to this shift?

This paper focuses mainly on the processes, strategies and substantive outcomes of integrating gender considerations in poverty alleviation plans within the bureaucracy at the national and provincial levels. Hence, it does not present detailed data on the interplay between state bureaucratic politics and processes, policies and policy context, on the one hand, and gender-aware planning and women's responses, on the other at the village or community level, and women's organisations. In the larger research, macro, meso and micro levels of analysis combine with feminist participatory research techniques such as participant field observation, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and women's life history in three communes in Vietnam and three villages in the Philippines. Critical issues addressed are: How do states govern when they mainstream gender and women's concerns in poverty alleviation efforts? How do women relate and respond to such efforts of state bureaucracies? How are participatory governance and strategic gender planning towards women's empowerment integrated in poverty reduction efforts? What does participatory governance have to offer both gender and development planning and planning for poverty reduction? How does gender analysis enrich our understanding of the participatory governance component of poverty reduction?

Poverty reduction is understood here not as an individual problem but as a community problem, and a function of building social capital and participatory governance mechanisms. It is by definition different from mere poverty alleviation, which does not imply the reduction of the number of people who are poor, but only the lessening of suffering by the poor, or slight improvement of the conditions under which they live. Sustainable poverty reduction therefore refers to the systematic or programmatic attempts to increasingly the number of people who are able to get out of poverty, and sustain that success over long periods of time for the eventual goal of poverty eradication or elimination, the ultimate target of human development. On the other hand, gender planning refers to the institutional framing and implementation of policies, programs and projects at various levels of society that contribute to the re-

ordering or reconstruction of gender identities and relations between women and men. Strategic gender planning is the attempt to develop a comprehensive program that will empower women for long-term success in improving their situation vis-a-vis men and eventually, in eliminating poverty.

Both sustainable poverty reduction and strategic gender planning would require the cooperation between government, organizations of poor people, non-government organizations, and the rest of civil society. In feminist literature, this cooperative relationship has been called “triangle of empowerment” involving women’s movements, feminist politicians and feminist public administrators or femocrats (Vargas and Wieringa 1999). Hence, the governance component of poverty reduction refers to how the relationship between government, civil society, and poor people is altered or maintained in the course of governments’ poverty reduction efforts. Participatory governance, as understood here, goes beyond the framework of accountability, as it also refers to the transformation of relationships between rulers and the ruled in ways that recognise and respect women’s choices and autonomy, and that include more accountable, participatory-based, and egalitarian political practices. This research is interested in the theoretical and strategic implications of integrating gender analysis into participatory governance mechanisms as a vital component of poverty alleviation, beyond the simple mobilisation of women based on their characterisation as beneficiaries of aid.

Gender, Poverty, and Market and Governance Reforms in Vietnam and the Philippines: 1986-1999

Women’s empowerment and well-being in most developing countries in the South are affected by rapid political and economic changes taking place at local, national, and global levels. Both the Philippines and Vietnam have experience high economic growth rates in the 1990s (See Table 1), partly owing to the influx of portfolio foreign investments and venture capital from the East Asian NICs (newly industrialising countries). Hence, current state-initiated efforts for gender planning and the concomitant responses of NGOs and women’s groups must be understood in the context of the current processes of economic liberalisation (marketisation), pressures towards political liberalisation (democratisation), and increased awareness of women’s and gender issues (gender mainstreaming) on the part of government and civil society forces. They must also be analysed in the context of how both gender mainstreaming and poverty reduction have become part of the dominant discourse within the international development , from the World Bank to USAID and other development ministries of OECD countries.

The end of the Cold War in 1989, and the widespread opposition to the harsh impact of structural adjustment programmes on the poor, particularly poor women, have set the stage for shifts in international development discourses and interventions. There have been an increased emphasis by international agencies, NGOs, including women’s organizations, on capacity-building, participation, social capital, good governance, gender mainstreaming in public management, and wider capacity development to accompany the wider goal of social development. International development agencies have begun to realize that too much emphasis on financial restructuring has led to the lack of emphasis on building local institutions and capacity for development, shifted their emphasis on “capacity development” in its programs and projects based on increased North-South dialogues and partnerships. Both the Vietnamese and Philippine governments have therefore aligned their national development plans with these dominant discourses. In the Philippines in particular, the comprehensive national plans under the Aquino and Ramos governments have informed by the latest development buzzwords on environmentally sustainable development, human social development, gender equity and empowerment, and capacity building (Bautista, Angeles and Dionisio, 2000). These discursive buzzwords are interpreted and operationalised in programs and service delivery that occur in the context of the devolution and decentralization of powers. This has occurred more swiftly in the Philippines than in Vietnam with the framing of the 1991 Local Government Code.

Table 1. Comparative Growth Rates* of Selected Countries in Southeast Asia

	Real GDP Per capita 1995**	Growth rate 1980-1995	Growth rate 1990-1995	Growth rate 1999****
Singapore	23350	6.5	7.4	6.7
Malaysia	9458	4.2	6.0	4.1
Thailand	6723	6.4	6.8	3.5
Vietnam	1308	4.7***	5.8	4.5
Philippines	2475	-.4	.1	3.6

* Average annual rates in real GDP per capita from the national accounts expressed in local currency

**Purchasing power parity in \$

*** The figures are for 1986-1995.

****The 1999 figures for Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines were taken from Asiaweek, October 29, 1999; the figure for Vietnam was cited in Can. Thach et; al. *Donor-Initiated Research Capacity in Vietnam*.

Source: Bautista, Angeles and Dionision (2000: 1) citing Ahuja, Vinod et. al. *Everyone's Miracle. Revisiting Poverty and Inequality in East Asia*. World Bank. Washington DC as cited in Lim (1999).

The Philippines and Vietnam represent two interesting cases with differing policy contexts, political-ideological environments, bureaucratic cultures, and levels of economic industrialisation. Thus, they offer contrasting insights on the intersection between gender and state bureaucratic politics, especially in the period after 1986. The Philippines has, since 1986, undergone a formal liberal democratic transition from authoritarian rule, marked by a liberal economic policy regime under a weak but patrimonial state. This political transition started under a woman president (Aquino) whose candidacy was given widespread support by popular women's groups. Her administration, and her successors, emphasised mainstreaming women's concerns in development plans. This was accomplished through government line agencies and the reorganised National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) that brought feminist activists and advocates into government service. Likewise, since the consolidation of socialism in Vietnam, chapters of the Women's Union have been established at every level of government, and the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCAW) was given much broader scope and powers (Hainsworth and Trang 1997).

Vietnam, like the Philippines, is aspiring to become a newly industrialised country through market reforms started in 1986 under *doi moi* (change or renovation), guided by socialist state ideology. The pace of such reforms have been much slower in Vietnam compared to the Philippines, due to the dominance of more conservative elements within the Vietnamese Communist Party and National Parliament compared to the pro-reform group. Nevertheless, Vietnamese people in both the urban and rural areas have been experiencing both the harsh and the positive effects of market reforms, from the influx of foreign investments, de-collectivisation of agricultural production, increased use of cost-recovery schemes such as user fees, and privatization of some state companies.

Market reforms in both countries have been accompanied by rapid increase in relative poverty, and deterioration of social services (Irvin 1991, Mallon and Irvin 1997, Boyce 1993, Balicasan, et. al. 1993). Trade liberalisation, privatisation, currency devaluation, cutbacks in social services and tax reforms that accompany market reforms are intended to "get the prices right" and to further open up the economy. These trends associated with structural adjustment and global restructuring, have been found to disproportionately affect women, the poor, and other disadvantaged groups. It has been documented in several studies in developing countries (e.g, Afshar and Dennis 1992, Afshar 1991,1992, Beneria and Feldman 1992, Blumberg et al 1995, Elson 1991, Moghadam 1993, 1998, Paterson, 1995, Sparr 1994, Ward 1990) that, in the aftermath of economic restructuring, women tend to have higher rates of unemployment and poverty than men. Women's unpaid household work, farm labour and informal sector work intensify as male-female wage and salary differentials widen. Increased rates of anemia among adult and pregnant women are noted along with the deterioration of girls' health and education levels. More women especially from the poorer classes experience greater stress in making ends meet and keeping the family together, while others experience domestic violence in the midst of poverty, insecurity, and social frustrations. More women family members become single household heads as domestic or household structures change, especially due to divorce, male abandonment or migration. Parallel studies in Vietnam and the Philippines also indicate that the effects of market reforms or structural adjustment are harsher on women and children. These have created more poverty, austerity, and added demands and burdens on women, especially in poor rural households (Floro 1993; Barry, Van Anh and Hung 1997, Binh and Lan 1996).

Hence, when market reforms and development plans are found to produce "persistent inequality" for women (Tinker 1991), feminist scholars, planners and advocates examine the conditions and causes of this "gender bias" in the "development" process. They trace the causes to a combination of factors. Among these are the prevailing neo-classical economic assumptions on the elasticity of women's labour (Elson 1991). There is also the complicity of adult women and men in the socialisation of inequalities and differential entitlements in resource allocation (Papanek 1990), as well as the lack of investment in human capital of women and girls (Senauer 1990). The poor conditions of women's participation in technological and educational developments (Bourque and Warren 1990, 1993) are further compounded by shifts in corporate strategies to reorganise production and gender relations (Ward and Pyle 1995; Fernandez-Kelly and Sassen 1995). At the levels of national and international development bureaucracies, both

government and non-government, there are persistent problems in mainstreaming gender principles and institutionalizing gender equity or “getting institutions right” for women and not just for market efficiency (Staudt 1997, Goetz 1997). Moghadam (1998: 223) asked a critical question: “what should be done to attenuate the adverse effects of crises and adjustment and to enhance women’s participation in the changing political economy?” Addressing this question seems even more important since gender planning, whether carried out by governments or international development agencies, has been framed on the argument that market-oriented strategies work best for women who are often assumed to be not fully integrated into the market economy.

Gender Planning and Poverty Reduction in the Philippines and Vietnam

Successive governments in the Philippines and the socialist government in Vietnam have given attention to poverty reduction as the centerpiece of their respective official development planning, e.g. the 1987-1992 and 1992-1998 Medium-Term Development Plans of the Philippines National Economic Development Administration and Vietnam’s Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction Program (HEPR). The role of women in poverty reduction has been given special mention within official development plans. However, it is not clear how such roles would be enhanced under restructuring as national government bureaucracies do not appear to have fully considered both in their plans and program delivery the gaps and contradictions between larger market reforms and the goals of economic efficiency and social equality. The assumption that market-oriented strategies work best for women goes along with the view that women (and other marginal social groups such as disabled peoples and ethnic minorities) are not as productive and fully integrated into the market economy. This explains the popularity and dominance of the Women in Development (WID) framework in most poverty alleviation and development plans, despite the official shift from “women” to “gender” in development planning focus since the late 1980s. The shift has been a response to the limitations of the earlier Women-In-Development (WID) framework’s attempt to integrate women in development processes. However, there remains a stubborn conflation of women and gender, a persistent exclusion of the consideration of men, male identities, and masculinities in gender and development discussions, as well as difficulties experienced by front-line government workers in operationalizing gender in their community-based programs and projects (Angeles 2000a, 2000b, 2000c).

Although both countries have created an open environment for international cooperation and put increased emphasis on mainstreaming women’s concerns in official development plans, they differ in terms of their bureaucratic operations and relationships between their governments, civil society and international NGO community. This stance of national governments towards women’s issues began, in the case of the Philippines, as a response to the United Nations’ International Women’s Decade (Liamzon and Salinas 1985). In the case of Vietnam, it was a political imperative of the orthodox Marxist approach to addressing the “woman question” within the context of class and national liberation from French and American colonialism (Eisen 1984, Molyneux 1981, Truong 1996). The understanding of the gender dimension of poverty reduction therefore must begin from the analysis of how poverty reduction has been influenced by both nationalist discourses and international development agenda, particularly in how poverty reduction and gender inequalities have been tackled in national development programs.

Income-Based and Outcome-Based Measures of Poverty

Both the Philippines and Vietnam have elaborate ways of defining and measuring poverty based on dominant economic and income-based measures of relative deprivation and need. Income-based measures such as the construction of poverty lines and official poverty thresholds are commonly used in both countries. Poverty lines could measure poverty incidence (head count of the number of poor people or poor families and households), depth (poverty gap: average distance below the poverty line as a proportion of the line) and severity (Distribution-sensitive measure is the weighted average of the squared distance of the incomes of the poor from the poverty line as a proportion of the line). For example, the Philippine government's official approach to poverty line identification begins with the construction of representative food menus for rural and urban areas of each region, prepared by the Food and Nutrition Research Institute which considers local consumption patterns and a minimum nutritional calorie requirement of 2,000 kilocalories per person per day, with 80-100% of recommended daily allowance for vitamins and minerals. In Vietnam, the poverty line is measured by the amount of monthly rice consumption, which roughly translates into the caloric daily requirements of an average person. As another income-based poverty measure, both Vietnam and the Philippines also utilise for international comparative purposes the World Bank’s \$1 per day person (at 1985 purchasing power parity). This is the income needed for a family of five to be considered no longer poor. A \$1 US per day income roughly translates into 6,000 pesos per month, with median monthly food expenses at 3,000 pesos. In

Vietnam, the same measurement is roughly equivalent to 520,000 Vietnamese dong monthly income for a family of five.

There are serious comparability and consistency problems in the use of official poverty lines, leading analysts in the Philippines to develop the Fixed Level of Living Lines (FLOL). The poverty lines obtained are often not consistent and comparable across regions since the menus for one year may be based on the Food Consumption Survey done in previous years, and estimates of food thresholds for richer regions tend to be higher than for poorer regions. Thus, Balisacan proposed the use of an indicator of household economic welfare (loosely referred to as living standard) based on “cost of basic needs” approach. The indicator is derived from first obtaining a national reference food bundle which satisfies the minimum requirement of 2,000 kilocalories per person per day. The bundle costs may be adjusted to account for regional cost-of-living differences. Then the nonfood component may be estimated from the consumption patterns of households where the total incomes or expenditures are just enough to meet the food threshold. (Balisacan 1999: 98). The poverty figures for the Philippines along FLOL and the official poverty line are compared in Table 2. The government’s official measures show that 37.4% of the population was below the poverty line when the 1997 Asian financial crisis occurred. This was lower than the 40.6% figure in 1994 but it is still high compared to other countries in the region, with the exception of Vietnam which registered 50% of the population below the poverty line in 1994. The depth of poverty or average income shortfall of the population was 12.5% of the poverty line while the weight or severity of poverty was 6% of the line in 1997. As macro-based measures both the official poverty line and FLOL are unable to capture gender income and consumption differentials which are taken into account in other outcome-based measures of poverty and well-being.

Table 2. Poverty Incidence, Depth and Severity by Income-Based Measure in the Philippines, Comparative Figures for 1994 and 1997

Measure	1994			1997		
	Incidence	Depth	Severity	Incidence	Depth	Severity
FLOL	32.2	8.7	3.4	25.0	6.4	2.3
Official Poverty line	40.6	13.5	6.1	37.4	12.5	5.6

Source: Extracted from Table 1 of Balisacan (1999), cited in Bautista, Angeles and Dionisio (2000).

Outcome-based measures of poverty and well-being are also used internationally and in many countries, including the Southeast Asian Region. There is the Human Development Index (HDI) which is a more comprehensive measure that focuses on non-income indicators. It is a composite index reflecting three basic outcomes: health as proxied by life expectancy; knowledge as proxied by functional literacy, and standard of living as measured by real per capita income (UNDP, 1999). The HDI ratios range from 0 to 1 with 1 indicating the perfect condition. The Human Poverty Index (HPI) is the obverse of the HDI which provides a multidimensional composite index of deprivations in health, knowledge, economic provisions and social inclusion. The index measures short life (proxied by people expected to die before age 40), lack of education (proxied by percentage of illiterate adults), and lack of access to public and private resources (proxied by the percentage of people without access to health services and safe water and percentage of underweight children under 5). The Capability Poverty Measure (CPM) focuses on people’s lack of capabilities. It is a simple average of three basic indicators that reflect the percentage of the population with capability shortfalls in three basic aspects. These are living a healthy, well-nourished life (indicated by the percentage of underweight children under 5; having the capability of safe and healthy reproduction (the percentage of births unattended by health personnel) and being literate and knowledgeable (percentage of women age 15 and over who are illiterate)

The integration of gender-relevant indicators in both the HDI and HPI has been done with the creation of the Gender-related Development Index (GDI). The GDI is the HDI adjusted for gender inequality, which compares male and female literacy, educational, health, and income levels. The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) indicates the participation of women in economic and political life, including the number of women in key national government, legislative, and executive positions. Table 3 shows the relative status of the Philippines and Vietnam in Southeast Asia using HDI and GDI indicators. Vietnam and the Philippines fared quite well in terms of human development and gender-related indicators despite their lower GDP. The Philippines scored particularly high because of its .90 ratio for

education. This score however does not reflect the quality of education in the country, as well as regional and geographic differences in educational quality and access.

Table 3. Human Development and Gender-related Ratios for Selected Southeast Asian Countries (1997)

Country	Gross Domestic Product Ratio	Human Development Index Ratio	Gender-related Index Ratio
Thailand	.70	.75	.75
Philippines	.59	.74	.74
Vietnam	.47	.66	.66
Indonesia	.59	.68	.67
Singapore	.94	.88	.88
Malaysia	.73	.77	.77

Source: 1999 UNDP Report, cited in Bautista, Angeles, and Dionisio (2000)

Another outcome-based measure is the Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) which integrates non-income indicators into the formula. Using the Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) framework, the government has identified 33 MBN requirements grouped under 3 three categories: survival, security, and enabling needs. The delivery of “quality social services” would use structures and mechanisms such as women’s centers, day care centers, schools and scholarships, and women’s associations and cooperatives. Disadvantaged women that cut across all sectors are highlighted as one of the “target groups” for SRA. The MBN score is based on whether the family has income above a subsistence level; access to potable water, has a sanitary toilet, employed household heads and members above 18, members involved in at least one people’s organization, children between 3 and 5 years old who are in daycare facilities, housing that can last for at least five years; no severe or moderately underweight children under 5 years old and couples practicing family planning (Bautista, 1990; 36).

The Ramos administration’s integrated anti-poverty program, dubbed as the Social Reform Agenda (SRA), depended on nationwide consultation with grassroots organizations and NGOs, some of which were drawn into the leadership of Social Reform Council (SRC). This consultation was facilitated by the SRA’s broad political support base, and the participatory mechanisms, though limited in many ways, created by the Local Government Code. The SRA has all the current buzzwords in its three components: “access to quality basic services (imperatives to survival); sustainable development of productivity resources, and access to economic opportunities (means to work and earn a living); and institution-building and participation in governance (towards self-governance)”. The MBN was developed as an outcome-based poverty measure during the Ramos administration as part of its implementation of the Social Reform Agenda or SRA. The MBN is an integral part of a Community Based Indicators Monitoring System that has been installed in 5th and 6th class municipalities in pilot provinces. The MBN under SRA was adopted in at least 1154 poor *barangays* in 432 municipalities in 77 provinces (Bautista 1999: 75). Initial confusion regarding the indicators resulted in efforts to refine the measures as well as implementation of the monitoring system.

The Politics of Gender and Poverty Reduction

Gender mainstreaming has now been accepted as part of the official imperatives of government agencies in Southeast Asia. Efforts in gender mainstreaming however remain uneven largely due to the relative weak political clout and limited resources of national women’s ministries in influencing the bureaucracy and policy directions. The NCRFW in the Philippines and NCAW in Vietnam are only policy recommending bodies, with neither executive nor legislative powers. Much of their activities are focused on national policy advocacy, lobbying and doing gender training for government and non-government front-line workers. Hence, there still seems to be a lack of cross-fertilization between gender development planning and poverty reduction. While not all gender issues are poverty-related issues, and vice-versa, gender and poverty issues tend to be treated separately as mainstream poverty reduction plans and programs often make mention of gender and women’s contributions only as another “input” to be added. The succeeding discussion outlines some of the main political and bureaucratic factors that have shaped gender mainstreaming in poverty reduction in the two countries under study.

Vietnam’s experiences with gender mainstreaming are circumscribed by the solid legal foundations for gender equality under Vietnamese laws since socialist reconstruction, and official recognition of the Women’s Union as a quasi-state, quasi-NGO mass organization working for women’s empowerment. However, these legal foundations

are subject to interpretation, negotiation, and contestation based on deeply rooted adherence to Confucian value system which accords a subordinate position to women. This value system is also open to contestation, negotiation, and hybridity, as it interacts with the increased marketization of the economy and social relations, and informal institutions that emerge outside the parameters of legal and bureaucratic frameworks. The Vietnamese National Parliament, for example, has a high percentage of women at 26% in 1997 and easily one of the highest in the world. The relative influence of women parliamentarians in critical policy areas such as the national budget and finance, defense and fiscal policy, and their marginalization from key cabinet and parliamentary committee positions are also open to questions. What is rather odd in the Vietnamese case compared to other Southern developing countries (but perhaps not to former Eastern European countries) where female political representation looks like a pyramid – the number of women thin out as you get to the top --, is that there are fewer women in provincial and district governments and local commune-level People's Committees than at the national level. Such trend could be explained either in terms of the greater room for political maneuverability at the local level, or in terms of much well-entrenched cultural value on sex-role complementarity at the family and community levels, manifested in women playing less active roles in community political affairs.

The Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction (HEPR) program is perhaps the most comprehensive attempt of the Vietnamese government to tackle poverty. In the official letter of the program, there is very little mention of women and gender considerations as the program details tend to assume gender parity and/or gender neutrality in the course of poverty reduction efforts. The implementation of HEPR is also very sporadic and uneven, and highly dependent on the political will, initiative and interests of provincial and district officials in accessing national and international funding to support the program. The limited availability of external development funds, as well as international disaffection with the "hidden costs" (corruption, bureaucratic failures, political risks, etc) in doing business and development work in Vietnam have also contributed to the slow pace of implementation of HEPR.

A more comprehensive analysis of poverty reduction in Vietnam would have to go beyond the analysis of HEPR, and discuss the operations of the implementing line government agencies such as the MOLISSA (Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Services Administration), the MARD (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development), Ministry of Resettlement, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), and the MPI (Ministry of Planning and Investments), among others. These ministries' operations will have to be discussed along with agencies such as the Bank for the Poor and quasi-state mass organizations such as the Women's Union, Farmers' Union, Home Gardens' Association, and War Veterans Association. Perhaps the Vietnamese Women's Union is the most important quasi-state mass organization (some reports call it an NGO) that is playing a critical role in the improvement of women's status in Vietnam and in poverty reduction.

The reach of the Women's Union is impressive. It has chapters at the national, provincial, district and commune levels, with representatives sitting on the People's Committee at every level of government. While Women's Union chapters often boast of huge membership, ranging from 200 to 2,000 paying members at every commune, many chapters are in dire need of revitalization. Although there are a few "showcase chapters" that have been very effective in implementing successful programs and projects at the community levels, in most cases, only a few key members are active and fully informed of ongoing activities of the organization. In places where there have been opportunities to access international and national development funds, the Women's Union leadership and key active members are often tied in strong familial or kinship and crony relations with the local, district, or provincial leaders. The typical poverty reduction projects of the Women's Union are reminiscent of the WID approach to women's welfare, such as micro-credit, micro-enterprise, literacy, health and hygiene, and family planning education. In most cases, these projects meet breaking points at which they are either terminated or remain unsustainable. There are also problems in replicating their success and scaling up their operations.

Likewise, a thorough analysis of bureaucratic spaces where women and poverty programs exist would require an examination of the government's overall framework on poverty reduction, such as the Social Reform Agenda (SRA) of the Ramos administration, and all government line agencies responsible for social service delivery, such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR); Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and Department of Education, Sports and Culture (DECS). Some poverty-related programs in these agencies are carried out in cooperation with other agencies such as the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR); Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Department of Finance (DOF); and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG).

Such an analysis, however, is beyond the scope of this paper, which only aims to provide a broad sketch of issues emerging from preliminary research findings.

The Philippines efforts to integrate women's issues and gender considerations took off after the demise of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986 and the democratization process started under the Aquino government. Under the leadership of the NCRFW in the late 1980s and early 1990s, feminist activists and academics trained in the politics of the women's movement collaborated on the mainstreaming of gender concerns within the civilian bureaucracy, especially the executive and legislature. These efforts has resulted in a number of important documents that have potential impact on the government's poverty alleviation agenda: the *Philippine Plan for the Development of Women*, 1990 to 1995, and the 30-year *Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development* (PPGD), 1995-2025, which guide government agencies in responding to Gender and Development (GAD) issues. These documents embody the Philippine government's international commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action (BPA) and the UN Convention on the Elimination of the All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The NCRFW was given support by various international development agencies such as CIDA, UNIFEM, UNFPA, etc. in its internal capacity-building and policy advocacy work. Gender mainstreaming has thus officially become an important agenda of the national and local governments.

On the last year of the Aquino administration, RA 7192 or the "Women in Development and Nation Building Law" was passed and was given added impetus by the Ramos administration with the signing of Executive Order 273 which approved and adopted the PPGD. EO 273 directs all government agencies at the national, regional and local levels to implement the policies, programs, projects and strategies outlined in the PPGD; incorporate gender concerns in their respective annual plans and inputs to national development plans, otherwise know as the GAD Plan; and include GAD in their annual budget proposals and financial and work plans, otherwise known as the GAD budget. The GAD budget may be used in the areas of gender-responsive advocacy and training to equip development workers with skills required for gender mainstreaming; program planning to ensure that gender-responsive plans are drafted and implemented; development of a gender-responsive data and information system; and setting up of institutional mechanisms such as GAD Focal Points, Technical Working Groups, and Trainers' Pool to ensure that GAD concerns are recognized and addressed.

In the first year of the GAD budget implementation, the 1995 General Appropriations Act allowed agencies to determine how much of their annual budget should be allotted to the GAD plan, but few agencies came up with their GAD budget. To ensure that all agencies would comply, the 1998 General Appropriations Act and the Local Budget Memorandum directed all national and local government units and other agencies to set aside a minimum of 5% out of their 1998 appropriations for programs, projects and activities in accordance with the Women in Development and Nation Building Law. RA 7192 also directs agencies and LGUs to use up to 30% of their official development assistance for GAD on top of the 5% GAD budget provided for under the 1998 Appropriations Act. The GAD budget may be taken from the agencies' regular budget, and its special project fund and from the Priority Program/ Project Fund to undertake new "GAD investments" such as baseline research to identify gender issues; counterpart Philippine government fund for foreign funded GAD projects; and expansion of GAD advocacy and technical assistance down to the local levels. Philippine women's NGOs, on the other hand, straddled between the continuing emphasis on women's organizing, gender sensitivity training, gender advocacy within and outside government, and the integration of gender concerns within government programs

Government service delivery in the Philippines and Vietnam is often hampered by the lack of coordination, and inability to tap into the ongoing initiatives of women's organizations, particularly the growing NGO community. Such problems are most acute in the case of the Philippines, where the personality-oriented political culture works against continuity in bureaucratic programs and service delivery. For example, the continued implementation of the Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (CIDSS) program, under SRA is threatened by the lack of political will on the part of the Estrada administration to continue the programs identified with former President Ramos. Thus instead of simply strengthening the SRA implementation, the government of President Estrada came up with its own poverty alleviation strategy through the *Lingap Para sa Mahihirap* Fund and the identification of the 100 poorest families in every municipality for targeting purposes.

The Philippine government also created a policy advisory body called the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), which from the onset has been saddled with controversy around the issue of partnership between the government and civil society organizations who are involved, and not involved, in the Commission. Many NGOs and

people's organizations who were supportive of the Aquino and Ramos administrations and those identified with the national democratic movement are conspicuously absent from the composition of NAPC and its supporters. The Commission also lacks the necessary resources, human and material, as well as the political powers and credibility needed to make it not just a policy advisor-overseer but also as a permanent implementing agency. On the positive side, the elected Vice-Commissioner for non-government sector of NAPC, Princess Nemenzo, is a well-known feminist advocate who is active in the women's movement. There is also increased interest on the integration of gender concerns in poverty reduction efforts among the women members of NAPC, the women's organizations, and broad coalition networks within the Commission, which could lead to the introduction of a gender framework within the government's poverty alleviation plan.

Vietnam is in a way fortunate to be able to avoid the pitfalls of a weak liberal democratic state and a political culture that is fixated in legal battles and personality-oriented electoral exercises. Vietnam is often characterised rather inaccurately as having as a strong, over-bearing, over-centralised state with a bloated bureaucracy that values hierarchy, authority lines, and top-down planning. However, the State's effective control has continuously been challenged and/or supplemented by local informal institutions especially in areas of social and economic life where the state has abdicated its responsibility, as in social safety net provision, disaster relief and rehabilitation, and job creation. This explains why the state, despite its characterisation as strong, has not been able to utilize its power in expanding the national revenue base, particularly those emerging from the informal economy and business sectors, in order to fund its job creation schemes and social programmes. This also explains why despite the overall seriousness of the Vietnamese State in responding to the needs of peasants and workers, we are seeing examples of collective action among their ranks which challenge the lack of consultative mechanisms and processes in the course of implementing urban and rural infrastructure development projects.

Another critical area where both the Vietnamese and Philippine governments have largely failed is in improving the plight of minority peoples, especially of women and girl ethnic minorities. This tends to be a blind spot for the state leadership in both countries which are dominated by dominant ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups. This explains why the poor among ethnic minorities in the rural areas fare worst than the poor in dominant majority groups in both rural and urban areas.

Conclusions

This study has examined the relationship between gender planning, governance, and poverty reduction efforts in the Philippines and Vietnam which have differing policy contexts, political ideological environment, bureaucratic culture, levels of economic growth and industrialisation, and activities of women's organisations and NGOs. It provides contrasting insights on the integration of gender in state bureaucratic politics in the framing of poverty alleviation plans.

There are at least four general conclusions emerging from the above discussion. First is that the implementation of gender-aware programs related to poverty reduction is still scattered, sporadic, and piecemeal, despite some deep and subtle differences in their levels of gender mainstreaming within government bureaucracies. Government line agencies in both Vietnam and the Philippines have yet to develop a clear and comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the close linkages between gender and poverty concerns. In the absence of such framework, government agencies with more established turf and weight to pull could enjoy additional funding allotment for general and Gender and Development (GAD) related programs compared to women's ministries and mass organizations or NGOs. However, these government agencies tend to only continue what they have been traditionally doing without infusing an integrated and holistic social approach, and a more profound analysis of gender and poverty issues in their programs.

Second, the absence of a clear and comprehensive framework for the analysis of gender and poverty linkages is reinforced by the rather compartmentalized and fragmented approach of government line agencies to addressing women and gender concerns. This is confounded by the great difficulty among front-line government workers, implementers and planners, as well as feminist NGO advocates, in shifting from the original women-focused interventions under the Women-in-Development (WID) to the Gender-and-Development (GAD) frameworks that focuses on gender equity and empowerment principles. Hence, many projects that simply target women as beneficiaries and/or participants for the sake of project efficiency and cost-saving measures, are uncritically accepted as a form of GAD intervention. The conflation of women and gender, and the treatment of WID as GAD, create

problems in getting the support of both male and female elected city officials who approve budgetary allocations. In the Philippines, for example, the allocation of the GAD budget in many cities and municipalities is threatened by the lack of support by local politicians, and the parallel weakness on the part of city-based women's NGOs and other advocacy groups to lobby and get public support. GAD plans, projects and budgets are still generally understood by the public, government elected officials and civil servants, NGOs, and women's organizations, as mainly targeting and benefiting women, and not addressing gender relations and equity issues.

The conflation of women and gender, and WID and GAD, is clearly demonstrated in the way the Vietnamese Women's Union and the Philippine Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has carried out women's programs subsumed as gender-sensitive interventions. Like the Women's Union in Vietnam, the DSWD is perhaps the best well-known government agency in the Philippines that has a strong women's program in its poverty alleviation efforts. In its range of programs and services, the women-focused ones are those under the Women Welfare Program, i.e. Social Communication Skills Development, Maternal and Child Care, Self-Enhancement Skills Development, Community Participation Skills Development, Practical Skills Capability Building for Disadvantaged Women and Special Project for Women in Especially Difficult Circumstances. Both the DSWD and Women's Union projects are earmarked as programs for women only, and these are the very same programs that are understood as gender-related and leading to gender empowerment. There is however, little attempt to integrate a gender framework which necessitates the creative integration and problematization of men and masculinities into mainstream programs on family welfare, credit provision, job creation, community capacity-building, and disaster relief and rehabilitation.

Third, the integration of women into poverty alleviation projects and programs that see them primarily as mothers, homemakers, and dependents of men has resulted in their domestication and so-called "housewifization", which prevent them from challenging the distribution of power and decision-making within their households and communities. The Philippine government's centerpiece livelihood program for women is still the Productivity Skills Capability Building for Disadvantaged Women (PSCB) which mainly train women in traditional female skills such as sewing craft, toy craft, food preparation and preservation, and baking. This program, as well as many of the Women's Union income-generating projects, tends to reinforce the domestication of women, and the view that women are only secondary breadwinners. These income-generating activities designed primarily for women are likely to be unsustainable, given the saturated market, intense competition, low profit margins, and lack of access to credit. They also tend to overlook the workload implications for women who have many domestic and community-related responsibilities. The *role of women and households as social safety net providers* ought to be supported by appropriate policy and bureaucratic interventions that complement and strengthen, rather than substitute and undermine, people's own initiatives (Moser and McIlwaine 1997: 13). Policies that discourage people's informal sector activities, such as laws against street vending and home-based businesses, must be reviewed and balanced against the need to create strong regulatory environments, while providing and enabling policy environment for the poor to help themselves.

Lastly, female embodiment, participation, and representation in state agencies do not necessarily lead to the attainment of feminist goals or to the adequate handling of gender issues, which consider women's and men's concerns, and other factors of social differentiation such as disability, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. The representation of women in government bodies, their participation as beneficiaries and managers of poverty alleviation projects, and their role as government service providers are good, and sometimes effective means to attain women's empowerment. However, they are neither feminist ends in themselves, nor necessarily expected to lead to feminist outcomes. Women's representation in local government units and other decision-making bodies under the Local Government Code in the Philippines are already limited. And even if its provisions are well-used by women's organizations, mere female representation is not a guarantee that women representatives are capable of addressing gender problems, and the political, cultural and social constraints in doing so. Likewise, it is not realistic to expect that gender relations are improving, or that women's empowerment is occurring, just because women are targeted as participants or beneficiaries of poverty alleviation projects and programs, or just because women planners and executives are the ones who design and implement them. This is most clear in the Vietnamese case where increased female political representation at the national level has not been accompanied by similar trends at the local level, or by any significant policy changes to improve gender-related conditions and programs.

To be truly effective, social policies and programs must incorporate feminist visions and goals. At the same time, male and female civil servants and service providers at all levels of the bureaucracy need to understand more clearly the feminist values and principles of gender equity and empowerment and how they can effectively bring these

into their service work, advocacy roles, and work environment. They also need to ensure that such values, principles and goals are clearly understood by the local people, women and men, in the communities that they serve.

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