Introduction

The Philippines is one of the world’s largest archipelago nations, comprised of 7,107 islands and 17 administrative regions. It is extremely geographically vulnerable to natural disasters such as earthquakes, cyclones, and volcanic hazards due to its location on the Pacific Ring of Fire. The long-lasting armed conflict in certain parts of the country, such as Mindanao, and the negative impact of climate change continue to hinder sustainable development.

The Philippines ranks 16th out of 153 countries in the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum, which benchmarks national gender gaps across the four dimensions, namely the Economic Participation, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. The Philippines dropped 8 notches, falling out of the top 10 to 16th place. However, the difference in opportunity is still largely felt.

Gender Roles and Responsibility

Despite an egalitarian sociocultural history, traditional gender roles in the household continue to exist. Women are primarily responsible for all care work and men are generally perceived as breadwinners, yet it seems decision-making dynamics have taken on a more equal distribution. At a household level, decision-making on the use of women’s income is done by both spouses for 54% of women surveyed in the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey and determined mainly by wives for 43%. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of women make decisions on major household purchases, 32% own a house whether alone or jointly, and 12% own land whether alone or jointly.\(^5\)

In extremely impoverished farming and fishing communities, women’s and men’s economic roles are virtually similar and both equally contribute to shared income, yet the household division of labor remains the same and women adapt by taking on multiple burdens (economic work, care work, community work). The situation is similar in urban areas, wherein limited economic opportunities compel women to work full-time while still doing the majority if not all of the unpaid care work. There is systematically unequal access to resources, services, and opportunities in favor of men.

Education and Economic Empowerment

Women and men are both highly literate with gender disparities favoring girls and women, who have higher literacy, enrolment and completion rates. A significantly larger share of women is enrolled in secondary education (71% compared with 60% of men) and tertiary education (57% versus 43%). The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women commends the Philippines on achieving universal access to primary education and a higher literacy rate for girls in both basic and functional literacy. The Committee is concerned though about the 1) lower number of girls enrolled in pre-primary and primary education compared with boys and the lack of information on girls out of school; and 2) gender segregation in higher education, with low enrolment of women and girls in non-traditional fields of study such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and agriculture.

When more women participate in the labor force, the Philippines could add $40 billion to annual GDP by 2025—7 percent above business as usual. However, the higher literacy rate for girls does not translate into fair, adequate employment and labor force participation. In October 2019, the unemployment rate was at 4.5%; of these, over one-third (38.6%) are women. Men continue to dominate in higher-paying and more socially-valued fields such as agriculture and fishing, while women are relegated to the unregulated/unprotected informal sector, socially-perceived “light work” such as processing and selling fish and sowing seedlings and harvesting, or concentrated in social and caregiving work. The CEDAW Committee recommends that the government intensify measures to increase the protection of human rights for women working in the informal sector and efforts to facilitate the entry of women workers into the formal sector, including through the use of temporary special measures for women belonging to minority groups. It also requests the government to strengthen efforts to investigate and impose sanctions for sexual harassment in the workplace, whether committed in the public or private sector.
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The lack of employment and economic opportunities is one of the push factors for women to work abroad. Every year, about 172,000 Filipino women leave the country as migrant workers, seeking higher income to provide for their families. The CEDAW Committee recommends that the Philippine government enhance its efforts to effectively protect the rights of Filipina migrant workers abroad, through bilateral agreements and memorandums of understanding with countries and regions to which Filipino women migrate in search of work and strengthen the regulation and inspection of recruitment agencies for migrant workers and the sanctions applicable in case of breaches of relevant regulations.

**Participation and Policy**

The Philippines has signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Rights of the Child and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). It has also enacted policies for the promotion and protection of women’s rights and the implementation of gender mainstreaming initiatives and advocacy efforts including the 2009 Magna Carta of Women (MCW), the 2004 Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act (anti-intimate partner violence), and the 2012 Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act. The Commission on Human Rights is designated as Gender Ombudsman and mandated with the promotion and protection of human rights for women, including the investigation of complaints of discrimination and violations of their rights.

The Political Empowerment gap has widened considerably over the past two years, albeit from a relatively high base (score of 35.3%, down 0.063). This downgrade is almost entirely attributable to lower female representation in the cabinet, which declined from 25% to 10% between 2017 and 2019. Female representation in the parliament was also slightly down and stood at 28% at the beginning of 2019.

More often than not, women in political positions of power come from politically-powerful families. Indigenous and marginalized women tend not to be involved or consulted in planning and decision-making processes and as a result, policies and programs largely neglect the needs and rights of truly vulnerable women.

The country benefits from a historically thriving and vibrant women’s movement, rich in its diversity. Women’s rights organizations continue to be fundamental in advocating for women’s freedoms and have been instrumental in orchestrating civil society actions that passed landmark legislation such as the Anti-Rape Law and Magna Carta of Women.

The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) has a Women’s Priority Legislative Agenda for the 18th Congress that seeks to amend or repeal the discriminatory provisions of existing laws such as amending the anti-rape law to put the element of lack of consent at its center, increase the age of statutory rape from below 12 to at least 16, and repeal the forgiveness clause.

**Gender Based Violence**

Based on the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) results, 1 in 20 women and girls age 15-49 have experienced sexual violence while 14% have experienced physical violence.

In terms of spousal violence, almost 1 in 4 ever-married women age 15-49 (24%) have experienced any form of physical, sexual, or emotional violence by their current or most recent husband/partner, while 15% experienced spousal violence in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Gender-based violence (GBV) cases remain largely unreported due to the impunity, silence, stigma, and shame surrounding it. Two (2) in 5 women (41%) age 15-49 who have experienced physical or sexual violence have never sought help to end the violence or told anyone about the violence.

There is some conflict between customary laws and the justice system, especially on issues of gender-based violence and traditional mechanisms continue to prevent victims-survivors from seeking justice.

In some indigenous and religious communities, instances of early and forced child marriages (EFCM), as well as isolated incidents of a variation of female genital mutilation (FGM), have been reported.

The militarization of many indigenous areas, particularly in the north and south of the country, has resulted in the sexual violence of women from local indigenous communities. While there has been progress in halting human trafficking it continues to be a major concern, particularly during humanitarian emergencies.
**Gender and Gender-based Violence (GBV) in Emergencies**

Gender inequalities exist before a crisis and as a result, in humanitarian crises, women and girls are affected differently than men and boys. Pre-existing vulnerabilities are often exacerbated by other factors such as age, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity, ethnicity or religion. In previous disasters, several documented protection concerns have direct implications for women's and girls' vulnerability to GBV. These include:

- Lack of sex and age disaggregated data and data on IDPs with special needs, which results to aid being targeted at the general population and does not take into consideration the specific needs of women, girls, boys, persons with disabilities and the elderly
- Lack of electricity in affected villages and evacuation centers
- Lack of safe access to services and aid to meet basic and survival needs
- Women and children begging on the streets for food

General breakdown in law and order including lack of female police officers who do security patrolling. There are existing inter-agency protection mechanisms and structures before the disaster but they are in varying levels of functionality. However, after a disaster, activating these inter-agency protection mechanisms is typically not a priority. GBV survivors do not report for the sake of reporting. They come forward to disclose the violence they have experienced only when they know that safe and confidential entry points for reporting and services are in place. Thus, at the onset of an emergency is to put in place GBV mitigation and response measures.

**References**


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NDHS 2017 Sexual violence: Percentage of women who have experienced any sexual violence (committed by a husband/partner or anyone else) ever and in the 12 months before the survey. Sample: Women age 15-49