

Women and Irrigator Associations in the Philippines: Contexts and Outcomes of Collective Action

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is the diverse ways in which rural women in the Philippines, either through women's or mixed-gender collective action organizations, struggle to gain control over key resources, especially water and land. The paper provides an overview of the diversity of ethnic groups, which before colonialism exhibited a high degree of autonomy and equity for women. The colonial period, under the Spanish followed by the United States, introduced new complications: although women got the vote in 1937 and have equal access to schools, politics, and social movements, they have always been dominated by men. The persistence of pro-male biases mocks the numerous legal and constitutional guarantees of equality for women. Although women do participate in local organizations like irrigation associations and cooperatives, they are rarely leaders.

During the past decade, however, a number of grass roots, regional, and national movements and associations have emerged to advocate women's rights, particularly to land. Women have also become increasingly active in irrigation associations, which continue to be largely dominated by men. The one-household one-member rule combined with the relegation of women to being considered 'unpaid family labor' rather than 'farmers' fails to recognize the increasingly important role women play in irrigated agriculture and local water management. There is evidence that when women are allowed to participate actively in irrigation management, they are very effective leaders.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is a string of 7,107 islands and islets that comprise three major island clusters: Luzon in the north, Visayas at the center, and Mindanao in the south. Its climate is marked by a relatively high temperature, high humidity, and abundant rainfall. Rainfall distribution varies from one region to another, but the climate can be classified into three seasons: rainy

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season, which extends from June to November; cool, dry season, from December to February; and hot, dry season, from March to May.

The country is vulnerable to typhoons, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions. Typhoons devastate different parts of the country every year, while earthquakes and volcanic eruptions occur less frequently. In the early 1990s, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions disrupted lives in various parts of Luzon, which destroyed, among others, countless farms and irrigation systems.

The total land area of the Philippines is about 30 million hectares. Of these, 44 percent (13 million hectares) is devoted to agriculture, including the production of rice, corn, and several commercial crops (NSO 1992:341). Potential irrigable area is estimated at 3.1 million hectares, of which 42 percent or 1.3 million hectares are actually irrigated (National Irrigation Administration [NIA], personal communication). The Philippines' NIA defines potential irrigable area based on the 3% slope criteria). In 1996, about 68 percent (0.9 million hectares) of the service area was irrigated during the wet season; the irrigated area contracts to 53 percent (0.7 million hectares) during the dry season. Except for 3,000 to 4,000 hectares under bananas, all the irrigated fields are planted to rice (NIA, personal communication).

Filipinos numbered 68.6 million in 1995. The population consists of some 111 linguistic, cultural, and racial groups, who speak a total of about 70 languages, all of which belong to the Malayo-Polynesian family. Pilipino, which is derived largely from Tagalog, a language spoken in Manila and nearby provinces, is the national language. Roman Catholics account for 80 percent of the population. Protestants and Muslims make up 5 percent each.

CLAIMS TO POWER AND RESOURCES

Wresting a living in the lowlands, uplands, or coastal areas of the Philippines, as probably elsewhere, requires both individual and community initiatives. In the lowlands, the success of crop farming relies on a variety of factors, including soil fertility, rainfall, availability of water and other inputs, access to technology, and having the workforce to undertake certain operations at the time when they have to be done. While crop farming in most places is basically a household enterprise involving women and men, adults and children, some of the activities that support farms require collective action. One such endeavor concerns the construction, operation, and maintenance of irrigation facilities, particularly those owned and operated by the government or by a community of water users.

The question of participation in collective action for irrigation is often predicated on a person's or a community's access to land. In the Philippines, a person may be an owner, a tenant or lessee, or a tiller who has acquired cultivation rights for a cropping season. The interest and the nature of engagement, however, varies in each case. The cultivator, regardless of tenurial status, would be keen on ensuring that irrigation water is available whenever needed since this can help forestall crop failures and indebtedness. In exchange, the farmer contributes labor for the construction and maintenance of the irrigation system.² In contrast, the land-

²The author wishes to thank Cynthia C. Veneracion, research associate of the Institute of Philippine Culture, for pointing this out to her during a discussion of the role tenurial status plays in irrigation development.

owners, be they actual cultivators or not, have a longer-term interest in irrigating the rice fields. Primarily because of this, they may be willing to cede rights of way to the group or organization that will own or manage the irrigation system. Negotiations for rights of way usually proceed smoothly, although a few landowners have been known to stonewall irrigators' groups thereby delaying system construction or rehabilitation work.³

The fact that access—and rights—to irrigation depends on an individual's access to land dictates that any discussion about women's involvement in irrigation be related to the question of women's access to land. This, in turn, is shaped by the dominant gender ideology and the institutions that perpetuate gender inequalities in the country or region. The space for negotiation and collective action is partly defined by norms or prescriptions dictated by culture and law, and partly by the pressures exerted by competing parties or groups.

However dominant the ideology and however entrenched the practices surrounding land acquisition and control are, individuals and groups have ways of resisting them (Scott 1985). This paper seeks to explore the ways in which women, either as a separate group or as members of a mixed-sex organization (specifically, irrigator or water user groups), struggle to gain control, or at least a semblance of control, over such key resources as water and land.

Cultural Expectations

The country's ethnic diversity suggests the coexistence of divergent gender systems, which resonate with the gender themes of the pre-Hispanic, Spanish, and American periods. They also projected the tensions between the relatively egalitarian precolonial norms and the male-oriented Spanish and American heritage. It is widely believed that at the time of the Spanish colonization, Filipino women, like those elsewhere in precolonial Southeast Asia, enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and economic importance based on their socioeconomic roles in society and quasi-magical status conferred by their reproductive function (Reid 1988; Guerrero 1992). Women performed crucial roles in trade, diplomacy, politics, and religion. Gender relations were marked by parity. For instance, divorce did not destroy a woman's livelihood, status, or kin support system; property was held jointly by both spouses; and women retained control of their dowry (Mananzan 1989).

The Spanish missionaries imposed Roman Catholicism onto the native culture, and brought a notion of womanhood very different from that prevailing in pre-Hispanic society. Women's position became one of subservience. Any status a woman enjoyed derived from her role as mother and wife, or from her relationship to men. The Spaniards also introduced the ideology of the housebound wife, although it bypassed peasant women, who remained active in subsistence farming, and the working-class women in Manila (Dionisio 1994). Camagay (1995) reports that Filipino women, particularly those of the nineteenth century, had a mind of their own, and were assertive and enterprising. Moreover, the women working in tobacco factories (or the cigarreras) staged strikes to demand better wages and improved working conditions. But while the women continued to be producers and have the possibility of resorting to political action when needed, they left political leadership almost entirely to men.

³A well-documented case of a problem landowner is described in Illo 1988 and in Veneracion, Illo, and Volante 1985.

The United States introduced a more liberal ideology to the Philippines. Filipino women won the right to vote in 1937. They joined the labor force en masse as factory workers, clerks, sales staff, and teachers. The public school system gave males and females equal chances to be educated, and the mass media projected the image of the free white woman who held her own with men. These gains, however, masked the fact that politics, including trade unions and the peasant movements, continued to be dominated by men, and the working woman was still expected to be the dutiful and loving wife at home, putting her domestic duties above all.

Spanish and American influences barely touched the Muslims and other cultural groups, and distinctions between them and the colonized lowlands still remain. However, as a result of interaction and state efforts at integration, the cultural minorities have begun to show gender divisions similar to those of the majority Christian population. Even within the same ethnolinguistic groups (such as the Tagalogs or the Bicolanos), egalitarian impulses compete with male-centered biases. The net effects of these competing influences can be traced in many facets of Filipino life, including people's claims to resources such as land and water. Nonetheless, the notions of a woman's place and of separate male and female spheres tend to be more binding on Muslim women as a group than on Christian women. As a result, Muslim women have had less access to education and lower school attendance than Christian women or Muslim men. Muslim parents objected to sending their daughters to public school until the system accommodated the Islamic notion of spaces separated by sex. Attitudes have changed a good deal with respect to coeducation, but some prevail. Similar restrictions constrain women's choices for productive work. However, the laboring classes and the upper or educated classes have been less bound by religion. The former have to work in order to survive, while the latter, having been exposed to liberalizing ideas, are no longer willing to be confined to their traditional roles and now question the male practice of polygyny.

Within the family-household, power and authority rest with men, who reportedly head about 88 percent of all Philippine households (NSO 1997). The national figure for male-headed households is much higher than for many parts of Asia (UNDP 1996), but it is still lower than what might actually be the case. Although more and more women have been drawn into economic activities in an effort to raise family income, bias towards a male household head continues to be projected in government censuses and surveys. That is, whenever a senior male is present, he is usually reported to census takers as the household head although the *de facto* head may be a woman or the household maybe jointly managed and supported by the couple (Ilo 1992). Moreover, in household enterprises such as crop farming, a senior male is generally considered to be the farmer or cultivator, easily dispensing with the crucial roles women play in farming and their claims to agricultural resources. In Central Luzon, for instance, only 10 percent of cultivators or farm operators were women, primarily widows. A quarter of them till less than half a hectare (see table 1).

Legal Equality and Unequal Realities

The persistence of pro-male biases mock the numerous laws that Philippines has enacted granting Filipino women constitutional and legal equality with men. The 1987 Constitution recognizes the fundamental equality of women and men before the law. After intensive lobbying by women's groups, other codes and legislation have affirmed the principle of gender equality. The New Family Code (enacted in 1987) stipulates women's right to own property and to

Table 1. Rural land operation, by gender and size of holding in Central Luzon, 1991.

Farm area (ha)	Gender of the operator			Percent of female to total number of operators
	All operators	Male	Female	
All farms	350,818	315,985	34,939	10.0
Under 0.50	57,338	48,854	8,590	15.0
0.50 to 0.99	64,148	58,402	5,746	9.0
1.00 to 1.99	112,531	102,644	9,887	8.8
2.00 to 6.99	109,348	99,352	9,986	9.1
7.00 and over	7,453	6,723	730	9.8

Source: 1991 Census of Agriculture, National Statistics Office, Manila.

contract employment and credit without their husbands' consent. The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (1988) guarantees equal rights to ownership of land and its fruits, and equal representation in advisory or decision-making bodies of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). In 1992, Philippines adopted the Women in Development and Nation Building Act (Republic Act 7192), which sets forth as a national policy: "The State recognizes the role of women in nation-building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men." It provides equal access to resources, including credit and training, and requires the allocation of 10 to 30 percent of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) fund for gender-responsive projects and for programs and activities for women.

These laws are often thwarted in practice or have yet to be fully enforced. For instance, the right of children to inherit land from parents is circumvented by parents' granting land to sons and non-land resources to daughters (Quisumbing 1990). In the case of the agrarian reform law, as of 1992, only 10 to 14 percent of redistributed land had been awarded to women, and the average area awarded to women was significantly smaller than the area given to men (table 2). In addition, women's representation in decision-making bodies had been kept to 6

Table 2. Distribution of land reform beneficiaries, 1992.

Land reform instrument	Gender of the beneficiary			Percent of female to total number of beneficiaries
	All	Male	Female	
<i>Emancipation patents</i>				
Physical coverage (in ha)	363,277	326,496	35,815	10.0
Number of patents distributed	270,096	239,035	31,061	11.5
Average area per beneficiary	1.34	1.37	1.15	
<i>Certificates of Landownership Award (CLOA)</i>				
Physical coverage (in ha)	89,141	76,299	12,842	14
Number of CLOAs distributed	28,455	23,333	5,122	18
Average area per beneficiary	3.13	3.27	2.51	

Source: Department of Agrarian Reform.

to 9 percent at the provincial and national levels and to 18 percent at the barangay level (NCRFW 1995). Finally, field implementors continued to assume that only men could be farmers and they had been known to be unresponsive to demands for land by women farmers (Illo and Pineda-Ofreneo 1995).

Politics and Lobbies

As is the case with women in many places, Filipino women lack the political muscle to establish or protect their claims to land, water, credit, safety from physical and sexual assault, and the like. While women represent almost half the total registered voters, they have yet to turn this number into a political factor.⁴ Like men, they consider politics as a male endeavor and political power as masculine. Not surprisingly, therefore, men continue to dominate the elective positions. In 1995, they accounted for 83 percent of the elected senators, 89 percent of the members of congress, and almost 90 percent of provincial governors. The same pattern prevailed at the local level. Some gains, however, were noted between 1987 and 1995, when more women ran for and were voted into office. These women generally came from families with an established political base. Recruited by political parties that have traditionally included women in their slates, they are assumed to handle "women's issues."

The promotion of women's welfare and protection of women's interests have invariably rested in women's groups, both women nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and grass-roots organizations, and their allies in the government. They spearhead campaigns in support of or against a particular public or political issue, conduct legal education programs, and launch public information campaigns (Illo 1997). Umbrella organizations such as SIBOL or Samasamang Inisyatiba sa Pagbabago ng Batas at Lipunan do lobbying work in the legislature and propose bills addressing women's issues.

Organizational Routes

Access to development resources, including irrigation water, is often made contingent on membership in particular organizations. Entry to organizations, however, is gendered. All farmer organizations, including irrigator associations, are made up of men, with women accounting for no more than 20 percent. To qualify, a person has to be the actual cultivator. Because farming is erroneously conceived as an individual (male) undertaking, a senior male member of the farming household is assumed by everyone, men and women, as the farmer. Except in rare cases, men lead these farmer organizations. Men also tend to dominate the leadership of labor unions and other rural organizations, even when women constitute the majority of the membership (Illo 1997). For instance, women account for 57 percent of members of cooperatives but only 17 percent of the officials (Illo and Uy 1992). In most cases, men are chosen to be leaders because leadership is viewed as a male prerogative or preoccupation,

⁴Prior to the 1995 elections, a women's organization, PILIPINA, spearheaded an initiative to encourage and help women enter politics. Out of this and parallel activities in other Asian and Pacific countries a regional organization (the Center for Asia and Pacific Women in Politics) was born that was devoted to women in politics, with its base in the Philippines.

a commitment that would require considerable amount of time and energy, which women feel they can better spend on their family or household.

For their part, women are recruited to organizations that are formed to see to the "improvement" of communities, often involving the beautification of the neighborhood, improvement of the nutritional status of children, diversification of "home industries," and the like. In fact, the most ubiquitous women's organizations in villages are called Rural Improvement Clubs (RICs). Organized by the government's Department of Agriculture, RICs generally serve as funnels for government assistance (micro-credit, hog-raising, food-preservation, and similar types of technical aid) to rural women. In sharp contrast to these development-focused women's associations are the highly politicized peasant women's organizations.

CONTEXTS AND OUTCOMES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION: PEASANT WOMEN'S INITIATIVES⁵

The advocacy and struggle for women's land rights have been led by the *Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina* (Association of the New Filipina) or *KaBaPa*, and *Amihan* (literally, harvest wind). A small group of women's rights advocates, with the help of allies in the government, also lobbied the government for the protection of women's land rights in the uplands. Both organizations were active in the Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform (CPAR), a broad coalition of peasant and rural workers' organizations that existed from 1987 to 1993. During its existence, CPAR was responsible for launching The People's Agrarian Reform Program, which stipulated that: "All women members of the agricultural labor force must be guaranteed and assured equal rights to ownership of land, equal shares of the farm's produce, and representation in the people's councils and other decision-making bodies" (Chapter VII, Special Concerns, Section 1, Rural Women).

Although CPAR's influence on the agrarian reform legislation was severely limited, the gender equality clause has found its way into the law. The legislative struggle, however, was but the beginning. The peasant women's organizations soon found themselves pitted against the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), the government agency tasked to implement the agrarian reform program.

KaBaPa

This organization emerged from the peasant movement based mainly in Central Luzon. It was founded by 2,000 grassroots women in 1975. Currently, it has 28,000 members and remains mainly rural-based. It has reorganized its membership into specific sectors depending on their tenurial status and livelihood source. One sector is the *Katipunan ng Kababaihang Magbubukid* (Association of Peasant Women) where the issue of land rights is a strong point of advocacy.

KaBaPa has had one test case for claiming women's land rights. This involves some 350 hectares of former sugarcane land in Lubao, Pampanga, which was abandoned by absent-

⁵This section draws heavily from Illo and Pineda-Ofreneo 1995.

tee landowners who had gone abroad. The former sugar workers cultivated the land, planted vegetables, corn, and finally, rice. They were harassed by the military, and some peasant leaders were killed or tortured. The men began to lie low. It was the women who pursued the struggle to claim the land which reached a high point in 1988. The women leaders held dialogues with DAR officials and were even referred to the Department of National Defense, then headed by the current Philippines President, Fidel Ramos. Both the DAR central office and the Supreme Court decided in the women's favor, saying that they should be recognized as leaseholders who have first claim to the land. However, the landowners refused to give the women this recognition. They were thus forced to deposit their share in the bank, but the women are confident that they will finally get the land and when they do, they will make sure that women's names will appear as owners, either jointly with or separate from those of their spouses.

Amihan

Established late in 1986, Amihan called for genuine land reform and national industrialization while focusing on specific peasant women's demands, namely: recognition of their right to own land, priority to widows and single mothers in land distribution programs, just wages for women agricultural workers, protection from sexual harassment, and extension of maternity and daycare benefits. Unlike KaBaPa, Amihan has not actively sought affiliation and working relationships with the government, preferring to keep its independence and to encourage peasant women to harness their own resources for development.

Despite claims to gender equality, laws have been unable to protect or promote women's rights to land. Amihan's experiences underscore this point. One incident took place in Mindoro, where Amihan members attempted to occupy 110 hectares of abandoned land, hoping to make it productive. But right away, government officials gave the women the runaround when they tried to get data about the land they occupied. The women were even asked to present video documentation that they really were farmers.

A second case was reported in the Bondoc Peninsula, where tenant farmers belonging to an Amihan chapter are still trying to have a 166-hectare hacienda titled in their names under the CARP compulsory acquisition scheme. Here again, government officials have not been fully cooperative. When the hacienda was declared eligible for compulsory acquisition and redistribution to farmers, members of the Amihan trooped to the Municipal Agrarian Reform Office to be registered as beneficiaries. An amazed officer queried: "Where are your husbands?" The women angrily replied: "What's the matter, aren't we entitled to benefit from land reform? We work on the land ourselves, and shoulder a major part of the burden when expenses have to be paid." So far, only two Amihan members, both widows, have been allowed to register under the program (Illo and Pineda-Ofreneo 1995).

On the question of women's land rights, peasant women deal not only with the state but also with their spouses and male-dominated peasant organizations. Some of their problems are, in fact, rooted in gender relations within the family, to husbands' resistance to women's involvement in organizations, monopoly over decision making, and violent assertion of male power through beating their wives. Organized men also reportedly felt threatened and prevented women organizers from doing their work. Moreover, Amihan leaders have had differences with male-dominated peasant organizations over how land will be distributed because some male leaders still insist on family-based distribution through the male head of the household (Illo and Pineda-Ofreneo 1995).

WOMEN'S INTERESTS AND IRRIGATOR ASSOCIATIONS⁶

Within organizations like irrigator associations, women's interests are often swallowed by a narrower (male-defined) agenda. Being a woman and a member of the association, the struggle takes the form of harmonizing possibly conflicting interests regarding the use of resources such as water and time, and of fighting biases and prejudices about "place."

Water Uses and System Design

Interest in irrigation stems from a desire to increase crop yield and farm income. To this end, rivers are dammed and diverted to farms; rights of way have to be secured for the canal system; and labor and other resources are mobilized not only to build, but also to maintain the structures and facilities. The management and operation of the irrigation system generally require some kind of organization. Under the Philippine government's communal irrigation program, water users are organized to undertake various irrigation functions.⁷ Farmers' participation ranges from securing water permits and rights of way, procuring the construction materials, negotiating the system design, monitoring project costs, and contributing labor and materials as "equity" to the project (Korten and Siy, eds. 1989). The irrigator association formulates and implements the water delivery or rotation schedule, repairs and maintains the canals and other structures, manages conflicts, collects irrigation fees, and pays the government for the cost of constructing the system. While women have as much stake in all these as do the men, their interest is more complex.

Women's interests in irrigation and irrigator associations reflect the tension between tapping water for irrigation and keeping the water supply safe for nonirrigation purposes. Like their male colleagues and spouses, women farmers are keen on getting the right amount of irrigation water at the right time. During their turn to receive irrigation, they check their farms once in a while to ensure that water flows unimpeded to their plots. They are generally more conscientious in meeting their irrigation fee obligations.

More than the men, however, women have other concerns related to water. They are involved not only in rice farming, but also in raising hogs and growing beans, pechay, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, cassava, and other crops. Their vegetable plots need water, as do their hogs. Because women and their children are responsible for all these, they need continuing access to water sources that might have been used for irrigation.

The women and their households also require water for bathing and personal hygiene, laundry, and cooking. For these they need not just any water, but water that has not been polluted by pesticides or inorganic fertilizers. In view of the gender division of labor in Philippine households, women have a greater stake in safe water supply. They use the water in their housework, and they are responsible for ministering to members who might fall ill because of contaminated water.

⁶This section draws heavily from Illo 1985 and Illo et al. 1988.

⁷The Philippine government has two major types of irrigation development programs: the communal program, which assists farmer-owned systems; and the national program, which focuses on government-owned systems.

Because a water source does have different uses and users, an irrigation system has to be designed carefully and after consultations with other water users. Nonirrigation interests in water have been known to be raised by men during system-design negotiations. The urgency, however, is not as clear as when women articulate their water-related concerns. When shut out of the negotiations, women protest, sometimes through their spouses who are members of the irrigator association, at other times directly (barging into association meetings or putting up barricades). To gain a voice in the negotiation for the design of the system, women can join the irrigator association.

Benefits from Collective Action

Membership in an irrigator association bestows on the members the right not only to participate in discussions about the irrigation system, but also to share in the irrigation water. In exchange for irrigation water, however, members pay irrigation fees and membership dues, and provide labor and materials during construction and system maintenance. To most people, these are masculine concerns. Hence, like other farmer organization, irrigator associations are popularly conceived of as associations for men who have farms within the system's service area. Women, however, are more invisible in some areas than in others. In a system in the Bicol region, women account for about 11.3 percent of the members (Illo 1985); in Rizal Province (Southern Tagalog), 3.6 percent; and in Bulacan Province (Central Luzon), 2.4 percent (table 3).⁸

The low participation of women in irrigator (or any farmer) associations rests on the notion of one member per household, which belies the fact that, at least in the Philippines,

Table 3. Membership and leadership of communal irrigator associations in two provinces of the Philippines, 1997.

Item	Gender		Total	Percent female
	Male	Female		
Province of Bulacan (Central Luzon)				
Membership in irrigator associations	2,305	58	2,363	2.4
Association presidency	30	0	30	0.0
Association leadership (other than presidency)	120	2	122	1.6
Leadership at sectoral level	1,861	48	1,909	2.5
Province of Rizal (Southern Tagalog)				
Membership in irrigator associations	1,528	58	1,586	3.6
Association presidency	26	2	28	7.0
Association leadership (other than presidency)	245	7	252	2.8

Source: National Irrigation Administration, Bulacan and Rizal Provincial Irrigation Offices.

⁸The Central Luzon figure is surprisingly low, particularly when viewed against the fact that women in the region operate 10 percent of the farms (table 1). This is probably because Bulacan Province lies in the outskirts of Metro Manila and is home to industries and other nonagricultural establishments. Its proximity to the metropolis, source of jobs and market for various produce, might have encouraged women to seek employment outside the farm or to engage in agricultural ventures other than rice farming, including hog or poultry raising and commercial-scale vegetable growing.

farming involves more than one "farmer." Relegating the women as "unpaid family worker" not only undervalues their contribution, but also rejects women's claims to technology, resources, and benefits associated with farming. Likewise, it perpetuates an increasingly obsolete notion of a "woman's place," and fails to recognize the reality of new and rediscovered spaces that women can occupy.

Leadership and Privileges

Women lose more visibility among the leaders. They constitute 8.9 percent of all leaders in a Bicol irrigator association; 3.2 percent in Rizal; and 2.3 percent in Bulacan. The low level of participation of women in irrigation leadership is partly caused by the (mistaken) belief that men make better (or are the natural) leaders. This prejudice is reinforced by the dominant gender division of work in many rural Philippine communities. Because women are saddled with childcare, housework, food generation, and income-earning activities, they are understandably reluctant to take on more responsibilities. All these leave them very little time to do anything else. They feel that since men have more discretionary time, they should be the ones to take on leadership functions.

The male bias of irrigation projects and irrigator associations produces specific gendered outcomes, such as the development of male leadership, rejection of women who attend meetings on behalf of a spouse or father, and construction of systems that do not lend themselves to other uses of water. It also underscores the fact that participatory projects are heavily gendered, privileging men and admitting women only in the absence of a qualified male in the latter's households (table 4).

Premises and Promises

Irrigator associations that include women (including those whose spouses are also farmers) provide important lessons, particularly in connection with community organizing work with irrigator associations. Women in these areas belie the notion that an irrigation project interests only men. Data from Bicol show how women displayed considerable interest in the irrigation development efforts, attended meetings, and joined field inspections of proposed locations of irrigation facilities. Together with the men, they actively engaged in the discussions which would determine the canal layout in their area. Even among households that would not benefit from the projects, women tended to register concerns as to how the construction of project facilities would affect their property. Where the organization allowed more than one member from each qualified household, the proportion of female to total membership doubled (Illo 1985:43). It must be noted, however, that while a number of women became active participants in the irrigation project, the majority of women shied away from direct involvement, principally because of household or family responsibilities.

When allowed or encouraged to participate, women have had considerable impact on the association. They served as leaders, improved attendance during meetings and other activities,⁹ helped finalize the location of irrigation facilities, and lent firmer support to the con-

⁹In the early 1980s, in Aslong women constituted 10 percent of total IA members, but accounted for as much as 22 percent of the people who attended meetings (Illo 1985).

tributions that their households had to make to the association. Female leaders successfully negotiated rights of way, kept systematic records of transactions, and managed the association's finances. The employment of female community organizers provided the farmers immediate role models of active female participants in the project.

Table 4. Project activities undertaken in participatory communal irrigation projects in the Philippines.

Project stage	Type of activity	
	Technical	Institutional
Preconstruction	Conducting surveys (M,f) ¹	Securing water rights (M)
	Obtaining rights of way (M,F)	Recruiting irrigator association (IA) members (M,f)
	Collecting water-level reading (M)	Amending IA bylaws (M,f)
	Preparing/negotiating design (M,f)	Conducting organizational meetings (M,f)
	Constructing warehouse for materials (M)	Registering the association (M,f)
		Creating task-specific committees (M,f)
		Attending seminars and training sessions (M,f)
Construction	Procuring materials (M,f)	Formulating loan repayment plan (M,f)
	Delivery and/or issuing materials (M,f)	Mobilizing farmers for technical activities (M,f)
	Actual construction of dams, canals, and other irrigation structures (M,f)	Strategizing farmer participation (M,f)
		Procuring materials (M,f)
		Supervising delivery and use of materials (M,f)
		Contracting construction work (M,f)
		Generating IA counterpart or "equity" (M,f)
Operation and maintenance (O&M)	Distributing water (M)	Monitoring project costs (M,f)
	Clearing and repairing facilities (M,f)	Reconciling IA and NIA project cost records (M,f)
	Collecting irrigation fees (M,f)	Mobilizing farmers for O&M activities (M,f)
		Negotiating water-use conflicts (M,f)
	Managing the IA finances (M,f)	

¹The data in parentheses pertain to the gender of the participants in the activity. The case of the letter (F or f) signifies the relative proportion of the male and female participants.

Source: Illo et al. 1988:26.

In a workshop held a decade ago, the participants, who included workers from the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), the government agency responsible for irrigation development, suggested several courses of action for improving the environment for women's relationship with irrigator associations (Illo, Veneracion, and Borlagdan 1988:71-73). One suggestion involved the distribution by the NIA of different sets of bylaws, with the following alternative formulations of the membership provision: one person per household (the traditional provision), joint membership, or separate membership for spouses. The NIA would provide the government agency in charge of registering associations (the Securities and Exchange Commission or SEC) copies of the alternative pro forma bylaws. Another recommendation called for the training or retraining of irrigation community organizers (ICOs) to help them deal with gender issues and anti-women sentiments in their assigned areas. This stemmed from the observation that, in some cases, ICOs had been the major obstacle to women's involvement in the irrigation project or in the association.

There was considerable promise to aid women in their struggle to gain access and control of a key resource like irrigation. Shortly after the workshop, training manuals were reviewed for gender bias, new training cases highlighted women's concerns and gender issues, and plans were drawn up for retraining the ICOs. That was 10 years ago. A few years after the unflinching assessment of NIA's performance and brave promises, the ICO supervisors who felt some commitment to promoting gender equity left, and interest in women's or gender issues waned. Some say that the good intentions were swept away by the political changes brought about by the overthrow of the Marcos regime, an event popularly referred to as the "EDSA Revolution." But it is probably more correct to say that the political upheaval gave the agency a "real" excuse to forget about the nascent pro-women efforts. In a manner of speaking, the women became the victims of the power struggle that ensued within the agency.

As the experiences in irrigation and agrarian reform programs have shown, collective action is crucial in getting women's right to land written into law or in getting women's concerns about irrigation recognized in action plans or policies. All these good intentions, however, have to be translated into deeds. This requires more collective action and continuing vigilance.

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