

ASEAN Conference of Senior Officials on Sharing of Good Practices in Social Protection for Women in Enterprise Development

Keynote Speech

Overview

World Bank reports that more than one billion people live on less than US\$1.25 a day. Roughly three (3) billion people or 45% of the world's population, live on less than US\$2 per day.¹

According to the World Bank, 37% of Southeast Asia's population lives in awful poverty, surviving on less than \$1 a day. Southeast Asia is second to sub-Saharan Africa in the percentage of its people who live in poverty, and, with its larger total population, the number of impoverished people is actually higher than Africa's.²

Six out of 10 of the world's poorest people are women or 60-70 percent (60%-70%) of the world poor.³ According to the UN Women, two thirds of these women live in Asia.⁴

Women are more vulnerable to poverty compared to men due to various reasons that include limited conditions and opportunities for jobs and business development, existing inequalities in education and health, and gender-based discriminations.⁵ Moreover, in many countries in the world they do not control key assets such as the family home, property, and decision-making rights on the use of income, further limiting opportunities to break the poverty cycle.⁶ Hence, they are more susceptible to risks, economic or otherwise.

Women in Enterprise Development

Enterprise development includes microfinance, entrepreneurship development, investment, and growth in small and medium and microenterprise (SMMEs). Its initiatives range from providing equity for small start-up business to providing business skills development through mentoring, and expansion loans for existing businesses. It is defined as "investing time and capital in helping people establish, expand or improve businesses or modest income generating activities that contribute to the economy."⁷

Enterprise development is therefore a way of living: it creates jobs; helps people to earn; take them out of poverty; and eventually empower individuals as well as the communities where

¹ See <http://www.sasix.co.za/files/sectors/enterprise.pdf>

² See <http://www.worldissues360.com/index.php/poverty-in-south-east-asia-58049/>

³ See <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2014/06/18/betting-on-women-in-the-fight-against-poverty/>

⁴ See <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2013/6/resilience-for-all-main-report>

⁵ See <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2014/06/18/betting-on-women-in-the-fight-against-poverty/>

⁶ See <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/women-poverty-economics>

⁷ Ibid.

they belong. It includes activities like market development, commercial market services, value chain development, commercial business services, and social enterprise. In short, it is crucial to economic growth which is indispensable to addressing health, unemployment, and all other poverty associated issues all over the world including GENDER EQUALITY.⁸

Hence, microfinance has become a central component of many donor agencies' and national governments' gender, poverty alleviation and community development strategies in response to World Bank's gender statistics database which shows that women have higher unemployment rate than men in virtually every country in the world. It has been proven an effective take-off for women's empowerment and poverty alleviation. As it puts financial resources in the hands of women, microfinance programs have empowered women not only by generating income for education of children, food for the family or start a business, but also by addressing gender imbalances.⁹ "The Tulay sa Pag-Unlad, Inc (TSPI) in the Philippines, for instance, found an increase from 33% to 51% of women reporting being the primary household fund manager after participating in a loan programme."¹⁰

On their own, more women have made advances also opening businesses, building credit, and increasing their participation in the economy in the last decade according to the Asia Foundation. In Southeast Asia, especially in middle-income countries, women-owned SMEs are increasing rapidly. In Malaysia, SMEs annual rate of growth for women-owned is almost 10 percent. While in Thailand, approximately 40 percent of all businesses are owned or operated by women.¹¹ Across developing countries like the Philippines, social entrepreneurs are increasing vis-à-vis social entrepreneurship is gaining prominence in both profit and non-profit sectors in the country. "Enterprises ranges from engaging in house building projects such as Gawad Kalinga to selling sustainable lifestyle products like ECHOstore".¹²

Women's economic empowerment through enterprise development is therefore demonstrating efficient not only in reducing poverty at the individual and family level, but also as a powerful tool to boost economic development at the national and global level.¹³ A large portion of potential of women entrepreneurs' population however remains untapped in developing and emerging markets, with many lacking access to financial services, skills and equal opportunities required to be successful business owners. Only around 30% of small businesses and as little as 17% of medium enterprises are women owned in developing countries. Women are three times more operating within the informal economy.¹⁴

⁸ See <http://www.sasix.co.za/files/sectors/enterprise.pdf>.

⁹ See <http://www.sasix.co.za/files/sectors/enterprise.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2014/06/18/betting-on-women-in-the-fight-against-poverty/>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See <http://www.cherieblairfoundation.org/enterprise/>

Social Protection for Women in Development Enterprise

Women increasing economic participation in enterprise development need to be sustained and stirred if we want the wins against poverty and particularly women's poverty. This is where social protection comes in - appropriate financial and infrastructural support in the forms of loans and integrated support systems, increased accessibility to finance or job creation have to be put in place.

We have a couple of international and regional endorsements for social protection floors which include:

1. The UN ECOSOC resolution on promoting social integration in February 2010;
2. The UN General Assembly resolution on the MDG Summit in September 2010;
3. The 2012 ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review in July 2012;
4. The RIO + 20 also held in July 2012;
5. The UNESCAP 67th Session in May 2011 resolution on "Strengthening social protection systems in Asia and the Pacific
6. The 6th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum for social welfare and development (which recommends for the ASEAN level social protection floor and enhance collaboration among member states) and;
7. The United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific Brief on Social Protection the UN Country Teams in the Asia and Pacific Region and the United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific a common UN position on social protection.

In the 23rd ASEAN Summit in Brunie Darrusalam we firmed up an ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection. Among the principles we committed to strive for is the vulnerable groups' equitable access to social protection.

Somehow, we also need to be reminded that social security is a human right. It was stipulated more than 60 years ago in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949. Article 22 of the Declaration lays down that "Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to the realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality. Article 25 stipulates that, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Real Life Story

Let me end up relating a real life story of the Philippines' Convergence Strategy's beneficiary to make sense of what social protection is in the lives of women in times of hazards and sudden loss of income:

Geraldine and her family is a victim of Sendong (international name Washi). It is one of the most destructive typhoons that struck the Philippines in 2011.

The storm spared almost nothing of what her family owned. Early morning when the typhoon hit, she was making bibingka or rice cakes for the Mesa de Gallo. Helplessly, she just watched about 200 pieces of her freshly baked bibingka and stock of charcoal drenched by rain, and 22 kilos of flour wasted. The business is the main source of her family's income.

Sendong practically caused the family's savings which was spent on their basic needs, leaving her with nothing to revive the bibingka business.

Her five children, and her husband who works as a mason barely could have survive the impact of typhoon without the livelihood assistance she received through the Self-Employment Assistance Kaunlaran (SEA-K) modality of the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

Geraldine received a 10,000-pesos (\$250) loan from the SLP which she used to revive the family's bibingka business. Three of her children also becomes the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program beneficiaries, the government's conditional cash transfer program, which enable her to send them to school and avail health grants.

The Convergency Strategy harmonizes and synchronizes the implementation of the Department's three core social protection programs : the Pantawid Pamilya, the Sustainable Livelihood Program, and the Kapitbisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services.

It has to be recognized that the fundamental importance of social security for warranting social justice and the legal recognition of this right signifies that the right should be given appropriate priority in law and policy. Strong legal base is an indispensable condition for securing resources for social security. It is a ploy therefore to use the progressive realization of the human right to social security for non-compliance, and resource scarcity does not justify the government from setting aside its, at least, minimum obligations in respect to the right of its people for social security.

I am sure that the two days that we will be here, sharing good practices will inspire us to work and empower a lot of Geraldines. And as mentioned earlier, we also want to influence the workshop that Cambodia will be hosting next week that will lay down concrete actions. Mere declarations will not lead us to win the war against poverty, especially the poverty against women. I am sure that our outputs here will be inputs to the workshop that will give teeth to the declaration. With that, a pleasant good morning and God bless us all on our two-day conference. Maraming Salamat.