

## Right on Track

Two line agencies are now more prepared to respond to the gender concerns of their departments.

The two, the departments of environment and natural resources (DENR) and trade and industry (DTI), have just completed their respective projects that seek to incorporate gender as a consideration in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their organization's programs and activities.

Both initiatives were supported by the Institutional Strengthening Project II of the NCRFW and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

"The projects are right on track in institutionalizing the concerns of gender and development (GAD) in these line agencies," notes Myrna Janillas, ISP II's project manager. "This way, they become more equipped to carry out a gender responsive development within their sectors."

### GAD Tools

The DENR project aimed to develop tools for its GAD mainstreaming efforts. Marlea Muñoz, DENR's GAD Focal Point, cites how the tools could help the department.

"They could improve the skills of DENR's personnel, especially planners, evaluators and implementors, in integrating GAD concerns at the project or operational level. In developing these tools, the participation of women, both as agents and beneficiaries, in identifying, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating DENR projects could be promoted and encouraged."

The DENR project had three components:

- developing a simplified handbook or guide to understand the GAD concept, apply it in the design and implementation of DENR projects, and to evaluate the gender responsiveness of these projects;
- pilot testing the GAD handbook in three sites of the Community-Based Forest Management project; and
- training a core of trainers from the DENR's central and regional offices on GAD responsive planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects.

### GAD Planning

The DTI project, on the other hand, focused on mainstreaming GAD in its policies, plans, programs and activities.

One of its initial efforts is to enhance the knowledge and understanding of DTI personnel in gender analysis. This would help them develop skills in gender responsive planning, address key GAD concerns and issues, and effectively formulate and integrate a gender perspective in the policies, plans and programs of the department.

The DTI project consisted of four components:

- conducting GAD training and seminars for its top management and selected staff of DTI offices, especially those who would implement its GAD plan;
- setting up the two-level GAD Focal Point system comprising of a top level group for policy direction and advocacy and a technical working group;
- hiring a high caliber GAD technical consultant and staff to help the department in drawing up its GAD plan; and
- documenting the process of its GAD mainstreaming efforts and results.

### Close Linkages

The DENR and the DTI are just two of the line agency partners of ISP II. The NCRFW's close linkages with them aim to draw lessons and develop strategies for wider application of the different experiences of GAD mainstreaming in government.

Although both projects were short-term undertakings -- nine months for the DENR project and a year for the DTI project -- the NCRFW hopes they would result in long-term impact for the departments' GAD initiatives.

"It is crucial that these efforts be sustained and go beyond the project level and be institutionalized in the departments' processes and development initiatives. Toward this end, we at the NCRFW will continue to maintain close linkages with them, and all other agencies, and give technical assistance to them as they evolve into a more gender responsive organization," Janillas says.

## ISP II status

### NCRFW Adopts Strategic Approach to Implement Project

So far, so good.

This was the conclusion made by the performance assessment team contracted by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to review NCRFW's implementation of the CIDA-supported Institutional Strengthening Project II.

The team was composed of two independent Canadian consultants, S. Gulser Corat and Johanna Schalkwyk, and a Filipino consultant, Dr Amaryllis Torres.

In their report, they observed that "overall, much progress has been made (to implement) project activities and orienting them toward the achievement of results." Despite some delays in implementation, the team noted that "these do not reflect shortcomings in the project but strategic decisions to ensure the achievement and sustainability of results."

The report further said that "in managing ISP II, the NCRFW has adopted a strategic approach for project implementation that takes into account changing circumstances in the general context of the project as well as the constraints, absorptive capacity, and clarity of understanding of the government's mainstreaming and project objectives by its partners."

The assessment was done using a participatory approach involving the CIDA team, the NCRFW and its partner agencies. The team agreed that the assessment would "be undertaken in the context of the policy and strategy of the Philippine government for gender mainstreaming." This policy directs all government agencies to include "a gender perspective in the design and implementation of their plans and programs so these could "meet the needs of women as well as men and address gender inequalities."

### Progress

The team cited some factors in its report that have contributed to the project's progress. "All functional divisions of the NCRFW undertake responsibilities for project implementation through managing relations with the key partners, directly implementing activities, or both. Partners undertaking activities under memoranda of understanding with the NCRFW are developing strategies, tools and resources (that strengthen) their capacity for gender mainstreaming."

The report further mentioned that "resources and tools prepared by the NCRFW with project resources have raised (the Commission's) profile and contributed to the strengthening of its relations with its government clientele as the services and technical assistance it (provides become) more widely recognized."

Based on the experiences of this CIDA mission, the team would prepare a long-term work plan on the method and approach of the next performance assessment as well as the focus of future CIDA missions on the project.

ISP II is a five-year CIDA-supported project that would end in 2001. It is a follow-up of the NCRFW's first phase project with CIDA completed in 1996. ISP I provided training to key decision makers, advocates and gender focal points of agencies. It also supported the development of policies and plans for gender equality, most notably the Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development, 1995-2025.

### ISP II to Hold 2nd Partners' Congress

The Institutional Strengthening Project II, a joint effort of the NCRFW and the Canadian International Development Agency, is holding a three-day Second Partners' Congress in April. ISP II's partners come from oversight, line, subregional and statistical agencies in government, training institutes and implementors of other CIDA-funded projects. They carry out various projects that are supported by ISP II.

Myrna Jarillas, ISP II's project manager, explains, "Aside from facilitating the sharing of tools, best practices, learning and insights among our partners, the Congress enables us to have a holistic sense of the project's status and accomplishments. We also plan to set up mechanisms for closer linkages among us and resolve lingering issues affecting ISP II's implementation."

Partners will be presenting their progress reports or end-of-project report, depending on the status of their respective projects.

The reports are expected to surface the degree to which the projects have met the ISP's intended impact of enabling women to participate fully and be integrated in the country's development efforts.

The reports must also be able to track substantive changes in skills and organizational systems of partner agencies to mainstream gender and development.

This Congress takes off from last year's First Partners' Congress which resulted in the following:

- a comprehensive analysis of ISP II as implemented by partner agencies;
- recognition of the setting up of mechanisms as an important measure for interface among implementing agencies; and
- identification of gaps and issues confronting project implementation.

## Women's Legislative Agenda for the 11th Congress

One way for women to win the struggle for equality and empowerment is through legislation. The executive and legislative branches of government acknowledge this and have in fact drafted their legislative agenda for the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Below are the highlights of these agendas as spelled out by Sen Teresa Aquino-Oreta and Rep Patricia Sarenas, chairs of the Senate and House Committees on Women and Family Relations, respectively, and the NCRFW.

### Sen Aquino-Oreta: Asking the "woman question"

For Sen Aquino-Oreta, the anchor to crafting gender responsive legislation is by "asking the woman question."

"As much as possible, we do try to review all the bills and resolutions filed before the Senate to make sure that they are gender responsive. In doing this, the standard question we should ask is 'what does it mean for the women?'" she says.

The senator admits that this is a "huge task" especially since a number of bills and resolutions have already been filed and referred to the proper committee.

"However, when the bill reaches second reading, or interpellation stage, we try to scrutinize the bill as to its gender responsiveness, and at the proper time, propose possible amendments to ensure its gender responsiveness," she explains.

According to her, Congress must address the following priority issues confronting Filipino women: "poverty, women in power and decision making, human rights of women and violence against women."



Sen Aquino-Oreta presides over a Senate session

"I have filed in the Senate bills which seek to address these issues. Among them are Senate Bill 527 on wife cruelty and domestic violence, SB 910 or the women empowerment act, SB 1340 on anti-trafficking in women, and SB 1404 or the solo parent welfare act," she says.

She coordinates with her counterpart in the Committee on Women and Family Relations of the House of Representatives and the NCRFW to advance her legislative agenda for women. Just recently, both committees held a joint public hearing in Cebu city to discuss the various bills on domestic violence. At the same time, there is an existing "coordinating mechanism" between her and the NCRFW so that they could effectively address gender concerns in legislation.

### Rep Sarenas: Tapping the women experts in the field

Before she was elected to Congress as party list representative from *Abanse!Pinay*, Rep Sarenas has established herself as a committed development worker, especially when it comes to organizing women in the local

communities of Mindanao. That is why, as she takes on the heavy challenge of national legislation, she continues to rely on the women who are actually working in the field and taps local governments to help her advance her legislative agenda for women.

"I always try to listen to the women working on the ground and to get their inputs and perspectives on the various bills

filed, especially those about issues on women. I consider them experts by virtue of their experiences and direct involvement with women, and a lot of these experts are outside Metro Manila," she explains.

She also finds working with local government units "very productive," something that she used to experience personally, having once been involved with the Local Government Support Program of the Canadian International Agency (CIDA), which is implemented all over Mindanao.

"The local government units have their provincial and municipal councils that also have their committee on women. Within the councils, they can already discuss local legislative actions to address a certain issue even if there is no national legislation yet on it. At the local level, therefore, something is being done about the issue," she says.

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The congresswoman from Davao is determined to push forward *Abanse!Finay's* seven-point agenda in Congress. These are:

- freedom of women from poverty
- freedom of women from violence, especially in the home;
- quality education;
- achievement of equal partnership in development;
- promotion of the rights of migrant women workers;
- better representation in government and at all levels of decision making; and
- protection of children.

In the meantime, "as an initial action," she has sponsored a bill against domestic violence and trafficking of women and children. Both bills are at the committee level: the former is on first reading in various committees, while the latter is with the Committee on Appropriations and would be submitted soon to the Committee on Rules for floor debates and second reading.

Rep Sarenas thinks it is important to review all bills and resolutions for their gender responsiveness. However, she also realizes "the impossibility" of going through all of them.

"Other strategies have to be done to ensure that bills and resolutions are gender responsive. So my office, in coordination with the Committee on Women and Family Relations and the human resource development division of the House, conducts seminars on gender fair language for all committee staff. We have finished one already and another seminar will be conducted soon," she says.

## NCRFW: Proactive participation in legislation

A country's legislation is crucial to improve the lives of women and address the issues confronting them.

"The NCRFW believes that a reexamination of these laws, the introduction of a gender responsive legislation and a proactive participation

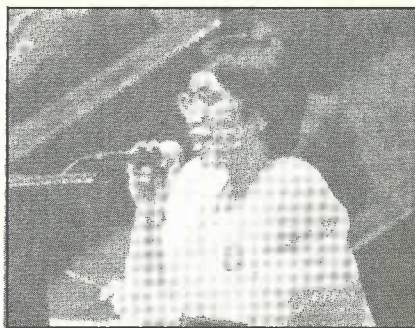
in the legislative process are essential to pursue the interest and welfare of women," so says Cherry Diaz, chief of the Commission's policy and analysis division.

This has led the NCRFW to seek the inclusion of its priority bills in the President's legislative agenda for the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress.

It identified three urgent concerns that need legislative measures:

- violence against women;
- women's limited participation in decision making; and
- population-related issues.

According to Diaz, "these concerns were selected based on their responsiveness and relevance to women's welfare as outlined by the Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development for



Rep Sarenas addresses Congress

1995-2025, their adherence to the Philippine government's commitments in international conferences and conventions regarding women's concerns, and their potential to gain mass-based support."

The NCRFW is currently monitoring VAW-related bills against domestic violence, trafficking of women and minors, incest, and abuse of women in intimate relationships and a bill decriminalizing prostituted persons.

It is also monitoring the development of bills seeking equal representation of women in third level positions in government and a proposed enabling law providing for women's representation in local *sanggunians*.

The NCRFW supports the bill strengthening the Population Commission and plans to spearhead efforts to review existing policies affecting women's reproductive health.

## A synergy of efforts

In the midst of all the urgent issues clamoring for legislative actions, Filipino women could count on a legislative agenda that firmly puts their concerns before both Houses of Congress. There is also a synergy of efforts among the executive and legislative to move forward the agenda and ultimately benefit the lives of Filipino women.

Still, legislation is a complicated process, influenced by competing interests and priorities, even by traditional prejudices and attitudes in the case of bills aimed to transform gender relations. Women must never forget the lessons of past struggles -- for example, it took almost a decade before a more progressive and responsive anti-rape law could be enacted. The legislative agenda is just one facet of the whole struggle. Women must be prepared to support it for the long haul and to continually lobby and advocate for it.

*"As an initial action, Rep. Sarenas has sponsored a bill against domestic violence and another on anti-trafficking of women and children."*

## The New ED, Up Close and Personal

The NCRFW has a new executive director. But to the Commission's partners, clients and friends, there is nothing new about her. In fact, they think that it's about time that she assumes the position.

Ermelita Valdeavilla, Ermie to all, is a true-blue child of the Commission. She joined it when it was still a young agency and was deep into organizing local women into *Balikatan sa Kaunlaran* chapters nationwide. Then came 1986 -- NCRFW was not spared the winds of change that swept government. The Commission was placed under a new leadership, with a different focus and approach in responding to the concerns of women. For the Commission's officers and staff, this meant reinventing the NCRFW and learning how to look at the "women's question" in a new perspective. Ermie was one of the few who was not only a witness to all this, but experienced the NCRFW's transformation both in her professional and personal lives.

*Gender Focus* recently caught up with her one lazy afternoon. The early summer was making its presence felt but inside her office, it was cool and the atmosphere was far from lazy. She was deep into work and minding the Commission's business. But she took a break to share with us her thoughts about being the ED, being a woman, and being an individual:

### What is your earliest memory when you felt that women and men are not equal? What was your reaction to this?

I never felt that I was unequal with my brothers while I was growing up. This was because I happened to have a very strong mother. She was the type who made major decisions in managing our family farm as well as in settling neighborhood disputes, a function that my father informally shared with her as a *barangay* captain for 14 years. She was the driving force in getting all her nine children educated, especially her daughters, since she was deprived of the same opportunity because her parents did not see it important for a future housekeeper to pursue a college degree.

It was when I became an adolescent that I started feeling the discomfort over male-female differentiation. Eventually it grew into a feeling of loss, a loss of privilege, as if something was being taken away from me. It began to bother me that girls during parties could not refuse boys who asked them to dance. And it was very humiliating for girls, who were not asked by any of the boys, to sit alone while everyone was dancing. The first time it happened to me, I had to ask for the ladies room and wait until the music was over.

I was already in the Commission when I learned what the discomfort was all about.



The new ED takes her oath

### How did you get involved in the Commission? Was there already a consciousness within you at that time that working here could be more than a career and be a personal mission to advance gender awareness?

I was a *Balikatan* youth leader in our community so I had some ideas on the work of the Commission when I joined it in 1982. I passed a very rigid screening process, something that impressed me because I thought that you could only get a job in government by way of connections.

As a social worker and a direct service provider in my previous jobs, I liked what the Commission was doing — helping women through projects. However, it was only in 1986 when I became sensitized. I was hearing Remy Rikken, our new executive director, talk about women's oppression, the hopes and fears of the women's movement. But I

understood her better when I took a course on Gender Dynamics with Terret Balayon. I was one of its first graduates. Yet, after that week-long course, reintegration became a problem to me. I could not comfortably connect my new-

found consciousness with my colleagues. Thus, I decided to join the first batch of students taking up a masteral degree on women in development at the University of the Philippines. So began my own journey. Fortunately, my work, my environment and my family provided a safe and supportive ground for me to cross the threshold of my awakening. I was changing, but so was my organization and the people I was dealing with. This was when I began to sense that what I had was not a job nor a career but a mission. It was scary, but I learned to trust in the movement and dealt with my insecurities one at a time.

### Describe yourself as NCRFW's executive director.

I consider myself a leader who is relationship-oriented more than task-oriented. I expect my staff to give their best always but when they fail to come up to expectations, as they sometimes do, I think of this as a normal occurrence that

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we need to talk about and process. I may be disappointed with the quality of work that you did, but not with you personally. For all I know, there

may be other reasons why you were not able to deliver the kind of work that I expected, and I would rather that we talked about this and work it out together. I see my being the ED as a privilege to lead the push for the agenda of the women's movement in government. I see myself as the one who should raise the morale of the staff, provide perspective and direction to them, and contribute my own little ideas to enable the Commission to make a difference in government in particular, and to the women's movement in general. Being an ED is an enormous responsibility but it also comes with its own power. You get to be in control of things, especially in prioritizing the myriad issues that confront women and how you can respond to them at your end.

**What do you think is your toughest challenge? How do you propose to face it?**

There is the perception that the cause of women is not a priority in this administration, and I think that this is our toughest challenge. Such a view is not entirely fair to us because the administration, through the NCRFW, has a women's agenda. We have continued doing gender mainstreaming in the bureaucracy and we have taken it one step further by involving the regional offices and local governments in the process. We still monitor how agencies plan and implement their GAD (gender and development) budget and provide technical assistance to those who are still grappling on how to do it. We have coordinated with both Houses of Congress and come up with a legislative agenda for women. Maybe, we don't have the President's ear the way that we had with then President Ramos. But this does not mean that we don't have President Estrada's support. We're

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working out a strategy to get together key secretaries of the Cabinet to be our advocates during Cabinet meetings and who could represent our concerns to the President.

**How do you like your job so far? What do you do during those times when frustration is high or nothing seems to go right?**

I'm enjoying it except for the volume of work which can be overwhelming sometimes. The source of my effectiveness, I learned the hard way, is rest. That is why I try to allot a part of my time for resting my body and my mind, especially on weekends. During frustrating moments, I pray a lot, go to the bookstore and read greeting cards, listen to music, write to friends. Sometimes I take a shower and listen to the water which I find very calming.

**Who is your favorite woman?**

I admire very much my mother. It took me some time before I was able to fully appreciate her. She was a very strong woman who wanted to control the lives of people around her. She was empowering and disempowering at the same time. I used to promise myself that I would be everything that my mother was not. It was only later that I appreciated her strong spirit, and how her and my father's hard work enabled all of us to get an education, how she ensured our family's survival despite the harsh life in a farming village. I also look up to Dr (Leticia) de Guzman (NCRFW's first ED), Remmy Rikken, and Mely Nicolas (NCRFW's past chair). I learned a lot from these women whom I

also consider my mentors. From Dr de Guzman, I learned to value the goodness in life and to align myself with God's plan. I learned professionalism from

her and to act with proper decorum always. Remmy taught me how to be myself and to be happy with who I am. I learned from her how to process what's happening in my life. She guided me in processing my resentment toward my mother that finally led me to appreciate her. Through her, my commitment to gender evolved as well as my sense of sisterhood and bonding with all women. Mely, on the other hand, is a very empowering boss, trusting in you and your capability to do the job right. She's very systematic in her work, thinks clearly and deliberates on her decisions. I find it very endearing of her when she does not think twice about apologizing to you when she thinks she's wrong.

What I am now is, I think, 40 per cent of what my parents were, 20 per cent of what I learned from these three remarkable women, and the rest is me.

**Complete the sentence: "I love being a woman because..."**

"...I became the ED of the NCRFW, and by being its ED, I'm given the opportunity to be in touch with other women and men who are trying hard to make this world a better place for all. My being a woman has made me capable of compassion, able to empathize with others, express my feelings, and able to relate with the experiences of other women and process myself in relation with them."

*"What I am now is, I think, 40 per cent of what my parents were, 20 per cent of what I learned from the three women I consider my mentors - Dr Leticia de Guzman, Remmy Rikken and Mely Nicolas - and the rest is me."*

## Surfacing Gender Statistics

Statistics and data on gender make women visible and their concerns and issues more real.

The Seventh National Convention on Statistics, prompted by this insight, included for the first time a session on gender statistics during its annual meeting held recently.

"We would like to think that this is an indication that our gender and development (GAD) mainstreaming efforts are gaining grounds in the country's statistical system," says Dr Amelou Benitez-Reyes, NCRFW's chair, in her address at the start of the session.

The initiative to include gender statistics came from the members of the convention's organizing committee. Four papers were presented during the session. These were:

- Pre-Employment Sex Discrimination: A Three-Period Comparison by Dr Hector Morada and Lani Santos of the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics;
- Contribution of Women in Business to the Economy by Dr Margarita Guerrero of the National Statistics Office;
- Measuring the Contribution of Women to the Philippine Economy by Dr Romulo Virola of the National Statistics Coordination Board; and
- Gender Roles in Sustainable Agriculture and Aquaculture Productivity: the Case of Western Visayas by Dr Venancio Ardales of the University of Iloilo.

The well-attended session "only shows increased awareness and interest among the participants on women's issues and concerns," observes Prossy Dumlao, then chief of NCRFW's information resource division, who coordinated the session with the organizing committee.

## NCRFW Firms Up Its Core Values

Corregidor Island, off the entrance to Manila Bay, is sometimes called the Rock. For the NCRFW staff, the Rock took another meaning as the site of their three-day workshop where they crafted their organizational core values.

These core values, together with its vision, mission, goals and strategies, are the NCRFW's governing principles, the "rocks," so to speak, of its foundation.

These values, identified by the staff, are:

- commitment to gender and development;
- equality;
- empowerment;
- professionalism;
- honesty; and
- teamwork.

The values would guide how the NCRFW staff would behave on a day-to-day basis as they pursue its vision and mission.

Sarah Umandal, chief of its human resource development division, explains: "Not only do these values enhance the Commission's strategic directions but they are envisioned to further bind the staff together as they uphold shared principles that can guide their behaviors and actions toward one another and shape their life in the organization."

The workshop, facilitated by organizational development consultant Juan Kanapi, was a participatory process where every member was given the opportunity to surface the values that were important to each one. The six common ones were culled out of this list. A committee was formed to "refine and reword" them, after which they were clarified and validated in three plenary sessions.

A follow-up seminar workshop, *Living our Core Value*, was held, with Fr Percy Juan Bacani as resource person and facilitator.

Fr. Bacani pointed out the difference between effective values, which the NCRFW staff must aim for, and value indicators.

An effective value, according to him, is a product of personal conviction while a value indicator comes out of fear from authority. "The effective value is a repeated, consistent act that one is proud of and claims in public, and enhances her/his self-esteem," he clarifies.

Umandal observes the session was helpful in making the NCRFW staff think of ways to translate the values to everyday actions and behaviors, and eventually live up to the challenge of maintaining an "organization of committed, empowered, and honest professionals adhering to equality and team work."

*"Not only do these values enhance the Commission's strategic directions but they are envisioned to further bind the staff together as they uphold shared principles....."*

## Off the Press

### NCRFW Launches Legislative Guidebook

The NCRFW recently launched *Tuwara a Gender-Responsive Legislation*, a guidebook developed by Aida Santos, Eleanor Conda and Ma Dulce Natividad.

It is "primarily designed to assist (the) legislative staff and technical staff of key government agencies tasked with liaison work between the executive and legislative branches" develop gender-sensitive legislative measures.

The guidebook has two volumes. Volume One deals with basic "ideas, concepts and frameworks" on gender and development and social transformation. It analyzes some existing laws using gender lens. Volume Two, on the other hand, "focuses on the application of the ideas, concepts and frameworks on the actual legislative process." Readers can go "through a step-by-step process of integrating gender and rights into lawmaking."

According to the NCRFW, the guidebook "is a work-in-progress...., (an) initial guide in ensuring that legislation responds to women's gender needs and a first step toward the eventual transformation of a society where women and men enjoy equal dignity and worth as persons."

The publication of the guidebook took off from the result of a project, "Enhancing Partners' Capability for Gender-Responsive Legislation," which had legislative personnel from the House of Representatives and the Senate as participants. The project was supported by the offices of then Representatives Luz Clea Bakunawa and Teresa Aquino-Oreta, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organization. The NCRFW's policy and analysis division coordinated the project.



## Gender Focus

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