Gender and Social Transformation

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The concept of social change has increasingly been linked to ideas of some form of progress or development, thus giving it a positive value. Change is presumed to be unidirectional and moving towards an idealized goal—because as change often occurs as a response to previous conditions, it basically seems illogical that people would choose to change for the worse. However, the direction and value associated with change are imposed. The movement towards, for example, equality and participation, is merely a perspective one could choose to view, measure or evaluate changes in social phenomena. Change is a value-neutral occurrence that happens as part of social life and moves in more than one direction. While there is progress, there is also the paradox of progress—that each movement brings along its own challenges that must be addressed. The sociological understanding of social change is that it is an alteration of the underlying structures of society, which entails a transformation of social behavior (thoughts, beliefs, practices, etc.). Though value-neutral, transformation often presents an alternative practice providing a opportunity

for the creation of new practices. Social change is predicated on four basic assumptions on the nature of reality and society, which are:

1. Reality is a social construction—reality is constructed and reinforced over time, which is why social reality is also relative. This denies the notion of instinct in social fabrication;
2. Reality is reproduced and legitimated through practice—conditions persist because they are continually practiced in everyday life, reproducing the conditions making it a legitimate occurrence. There are usually systems by which the reproduction of conditions is ensured (e.g., social control);
3. Social transformation can take place only when a previous practice is altered. The alteration must be practiced and reproduced as a community effort because it is a *social* change. Space for transformation and the creation of alternatives must be made; and
4. The individual and society cannot be separated as they both exist and participate within particular structures

and cultures. Each is permeated by and acts upon the other, forming the very dynamic of social life.

Gender is a social construction based on the male-female dichotomy imposed upon individuals from the very beginning and reinforced throughout one's life. More than being a classification of sexes, gender has increasingly become attached to notions of inequality and deprivation. The definitions of what it is to be male or female are based on the assumption that because the two are different, one is necessarily better than the other by comparison, and that difference is the source of inequality between the sexes. Unfortunately, it is through definitions that concepts like gender are made operational in individual and social life. As a result, the very ways we interpret and act upon the notion of gender is founded on inequality, making it almost inherent to the gender discourse. Gender is imposed from birth. The presence of particular biological attributes automatically assigns the label of 'male' or 'female' to an individual. Children are then raised according to the constructed and accepted parameters of what it means to be 'male' or 'female'—the type of behavior one is expected to display and the ways of thinking associated with either label. Again, differences are pronounced and emphasized. Gender dichotomy does not tolerate the blurring of differences: roles are clearly defined with corresponding expectations. The learning process is promoted and perpetuated by many different social institutions in an individual's lifetime.

First, there is the family and educational institutions along with the church institutions. Then there is a whole array of institutions which impose the differences upon individuals—for example, the mere fact that all important documents insist that people identify themselves as either male or female—with no other options provided. Individuals become defined by gender, which is expressed in all aspects of personal and social life— from the way one speaks to the type of underwear one uses. As a consequence of this constant bombardment and its internalization, the meanings and practices attached to being either male or female are often regarded as 'natural,' in fact even irreversible and inevitable.

Unfortunately, throughout history, the inequality associated with gender has been to the extreme disadvantage of women. Gender is surrounded by the politics of empowerment, access, entitlement and their conspicuous absence in the life of women. Pre-historical societies have been characterized as possibly having much less gender inequality relative to modern times but the increasing and unequal division of labor in the different periods of development has defined the place of women in society. Empowering mechanisms such as access to health services, education, economic and political power are tainted by this inequality. Furthermore, the purported strength and superiority of men established the dominance of patriarchy worldwide. Women have been pushed into the margins, denied of education, rights and recognition— making them unable to assert their

presence in this "man's world." Women have only begun to enter the public sphere of late and though there have been great advances for women in the past two decades, inequalities persist and prevent women from fully participating in and contributing to society. In terms of health, malnutrition especially afflicts women and girl children. While the high incidence of reproductive health risks are common to women, it is only recently that much attention has been given to reproductive and maternal health.

Inequality still pervades education patterns and trends. Fields of specialization still remain gender-typed. Women's fields are still very much linked to their traditional roles as caregivers and teachers. Aside from occupying lower positions at work, the work of women is compounded by the unpaid work they are expected to do at home. In many instances, the demands of their household work prevent women from pursuing higher levels of schooling as evidenced by the majority of low-income, out-of-school, young women who cite housekeeping as the main reason they are not in school.

In addition to access to health and education, another crucial component in the empowerment of women is access to paid work. Paid work allows women to achieve self-reliance and economic independence, which in turn bear greatly on the well-being of their households. In the economic sphere, women generally suffer from higher unemployment rates than men. The rural labor force is largely employed in agriculture in which women's contributions have declined absolutely and relatively due to the decreasing requirements of "female" farm work. Other women workers are employed in few occupations and are mostly found in sales and services. Along with clerical and professional occupations, these make up what are considered "female occupations" with dominant female employment. On the whole, women receive lower wages, occupy lower positions and have smaller chances of promotion. Gender discrimination, found even at the hiring stage, makes securing employment even more difficult for women. Domestic help work —largely women's work—has the lowest wage rates and highest physical and mental risks. Seventy-nine percent of job-related problems (violation of contract, bad working conditions, etc.) are experienced by women. Furthermore, women who work full-time and do household work have the longest total work hours. This is reflected worldwide in terms of HDI (Human Development Index) which show that women carry 53 percent of the burden of work in developing countries and 51 percent in industrial countries.[1] While three quarters of men's total work time is spent in paid activities, a large proportion of women's work time is spent unpaid, undervalued and unrecognized.

In the political sphere, there has been an increase in women running for and occupying positions in public office. But even though more than 50 percent of voters are women, relatively few women are found in elective offices. In nonelective offices, the majority of women tend to occupy middle and low-ranking

positions and do not experience rapid rates of promotion. This means that women's right to suffrage has not been translated into women's entry into politics and political concern over women's issues. Politics is still dominated by men and the few women in influential positions do not necessarily advocate women's concerns. This can be attributed, in part, to the social norms and traditions that pervade politics.

In the attempt to change the position of women in society, "empowerment and equality" has been the 'catch phrase.' Access to education, health and paid work greatly figure in the empowerment of women and the status of women is likewise reflected in the ability and opportunity to participate in decision-making processes both in the public and private spheres. Changing definitions are seen in the way institutions are slowly but increasingly making space for women's presence in the public sphere. But the transformation is still incomplete. Responses to the issues of gender must be aimed at the more fundamental constructions governing social reality. At this point, changes are taking place from the 'outside' which hopefully, can penetrate and transform the 'core,' but a parallel change must also take place from the 'core' outwards in order to give meaning and legitimacy to the new conditions being advocated for women.

A particular phenomenon deeply rooted in gender issues is domestic violence, which is a part of a greater issue —violence against women (VAW). Violence against women is not just about the physical assault on the persons of women. It differs from violence *per se* because its existence rests upon the continued subordination of women and the reinforcement of women's secondary place in society. It is a violence that attacks the dignity of women as individuals and as a group because it stems from a patriarchal system that refuses the rightful place of women as equal partners and is made manifest in the people around them. At home or within the community, there are numerous cases of violence against women which include domestic violence as the physical, sexual and emotional abuse of spouses. Recent estimates in the Philippines show that *anywhere from one to six out of ten women face physical, sexual and psychological assaults in the home.*[2]

Domestic violence happens across sectors but is more pronounced among the poor. Two things that complicate the matter of domestic violence—one, it is the very socialization process that defines the unequal positions of women; and second, since it occurs in the private or domestic sphere, it is not considered a public concern. Philippine culture places much value on family and privacy and has strict gender role expectations. The family is a primary institution and its integrity is supported and reinforced both by the Church and State. Divorce is perceived as a threat to Philippine society with the family at the very core of it; therefore divorce is not yet a legal option. The only option is annulment, the arduous process of which makes it limiting in itself. Moreover, it subjects women to the discretion of a fundament-

ally patriarchal religious system and its all-male clergy. Though times are changing, not much has changed in gender role assignments, especially among the poor. Women are tasked with maintaining the household while men head the family and take on the role of breadwinner. Girl children, from a very early age, are taught and expected to be responsible for domestic chores while boys are given the freedom to leave the confines of the home. The home is still considered the man's "domain" and the family his "property," entitling him to do as he pleases and barring outsiders from interference. The problem is amplified by poverty. Living in conditions of extreme poverty is an additional strain on marital relationships and limits the options of women even more because of their heavy dependence on their husbands for subsistence. The establishment of these systems and values means that conflict in the home remains within its four walls. More than that, these values, as practiced by the Filipino population as a whole, means that the avenues for assistance are limited for women who are victims of domestic violence. Not only are people hesitant to interfere, but they carry the same beliefs about the subordination of women. To compound matters, there is little recourse for victims because much of the burden of proof is placed on the victim and such assaults are treated lightly as "private family matters." Moreover, seeking help can still be frowned upon because threatens the integrity of the family. Women who have to leave their spouses are ostracized and take on an even more

disadvantaged and subor-dinate role as single parents.

Despite the difficulties of responding to domestic violence, women are getting help on three levels: (1) on the national level, (2) on the level of civil society through the advocacy and involvement of women's groups, and (3) at the community level, mostly as a result of NGO involvement. On the national level, recent changes have been made to mainstream gender. This means that the government has been trying to formulate strategies and processes to make them more informed and responsive to gender concerns. Gender has been introduced into the language of the government, making it part of policy formation, service provision, the creation of visions and goals, and resource allocation. Concrete efforts are: the Anti-Rape Law which restores women's self-dignity and recognizes marital rape; the Philippine Development Plan for Women and its successor, the Gender Responsive Plan for Gender Responsive Development which includes women in the development process as equal partners and stakeholders; and, the Women in Nation-building—Gender in Development Act (WIN-GAD) of 1996 which has identified a lead agency for implementation of programs and policies, and safeguards the sustainability of gender concerns through mandated resource allocation. In theory, these landmark achievements recognize the currently unequal situation between men and women, and strive to change conditions by making gender part of the state's vocabulary and by institutionalizing its importance. On

the ground, the government offers little in terms of service facilities. However, the decentralization process has led to greater involvement by local governments which have provided shelters, hospitals with special care units for women victims of violence and women's desks in police precincts. These are steps in the right direction but remain sorely lacking throughout the Philippines.

The greatest successes in the movement against domestic violence have been experienced in initiatives of civil society groups that anchor their efforts in the community. In this manner they change conditions and meanings among the victims, the surrounding community, all the way up to the local and national government. Their efforts not only provide the infrastructure necessary for dealing with the problem such as crisis centers and special protection units but through seminars and training, also attempt to change the value system anchoring gender inequality. A case in point is the *Bantay Banay* experience in Cebu, initiated by a local women's NGO, Lihok Pilipina.

Bantay Banay emerged from the realization that helping poor women gain economic power was not enough to free them from the conditions which prevented their active participation in the community and improving their lives. In addition, a survey conducted by Lihok Pilipina in two urban poor communities indicated that six out of every ten women were victims of abuse and 60 percent of incest victims were under the age of 15. It was found that battery and abuse cut across categories in a cycle of self-perpetuating destruction—many batterers were childhood victims; many mothers of abused children are themselves abused; among battered women more than half the of the husbands are on drugs; and many cases of homelessness, poverty, and sickness are results of violence. When these results and findings were presented to an assembly of representatives of government institutions, NGOs, POs, police, church, lawyer's groups and Barangay Captains in 1992, it was agreed that a wider community-based program was needed to address the problem. *Bantay Banay* was formally organized in coordination with government agencies, NGOs, the Philippine National Police, and with legal assistance from FIDA.

Bantay Banay is a comprehensive program with a spectrum of activities and interventions directed to alleviate, if not totally eliminate, domestic violence and violence against women. It advocates the following performance objectives:

1. *Organization* of *Bantay Banay* groups which are community-based and multisectoral should be able to access their own resources and facilitate referrals for the following services: temporary shelter, immediate medical check-up, legal assistance, counseling and livelihood.
2. *Mobilization* of community groups serviced by the agencies represented in *Bantay Banay* areas around violence against women and other issues affecting their communities.

3. *Training* of core teams of who can echo the following: basic sensitivity workshop, laws and legal processes, basic counseling, violence against women, and family dialogues.
4. *Establishment* of resource inventory, commitments and working relationships among the different groups in the village such as the NGOs, Church, government and private groups to respond to violence.
5. *Sensitivity to the issue of violence against women* in the policies and programs of local government units (LGUs) in the areas identified through resolutions and budget allotments.
6. *Systematic documentation* of cases in order to provide an ongoing update on data on violence against women to establish trends such as: extent of battering, rape and incest and corresponding coping mechanisms; effects on children; profiles of perpetrators and victims of battering; and prevailing attitudes.

As a community-based organization, *Bantay Banay* enters most communities through already existing women's organizations using the following strategies and approaches:

➢ *Organization and Training of Communities*—the *Bantay Banay* groups are oriented against gender violence and organized to respond to acts of violence, make referrals and mediate. Training consists of gender sensitivity training (GST), violence against women (VAW) and

basic counseling, family dialogues, laws and legal processes (legal literacy) regarding issues on women and the family and on-the-job-case-handling. The groups include women, men, local support groups, and the youth.

➢ *Involvement and Training of the Inter-Agency Committees per Area that respond to Community Referrals*—the agencies involved include the police, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), LGUs, NGOs and other private sectors.

➢ *Mainstreaming in local governance*—one program objective is to make LGUs recognize issues of family violence such that they support the effort by establishing desks in their offices and allocate a portion of their budget for training and honorarium for volunteers.

Bantay Banay provides the following general services and activities:

➢ *Services*—includes medical and medicolegal checkups, counseling, legal assistance, temporary shelter and livelihood projects. Referral among agencies involved and often necessary.

➢ *Direct Action*—since most of the violence happens within the communities direct interventions may be done such as: actual interventions in ongoing violence, prevention of violence, mediation at the barangay

level, temporary shelter before the referral process.

> *Advocacy and Media Work—Bantay Banay* also supports the passage of bills affecting women. Members are mobilized to attend court hearings and provide moral support for the victims/survivors. It also calls media attention for lapses in procedures and delays.

Since its inception, the *Bantay Banay* program has expanded both horizontally (to other areas) and vertically (including agencies at different levels). Aside from 50 barangays in Cebu, assistance from Misereor and TUCP DAW has allowed its replication in other regions.

Other agencies were initially reluctant to participate in the program but training and education radically changed systems and perspectives in these agencies. The seminars allow people to see that they are working for a common goal and are effective means of generating interest and commitment.

The *Bantay Banay* experience has changed the face of local governance. Republic Act 7192 Women in Nation Building–Gender and Development Act (WIN-GAD) in 1996 identified the DILG as the lead agency for implementation. Having little experience, the DILG found it necessary to link with Lihok Pilipina— the main proponent of issues regarding gender and women's issues. Through a GST seminar the DILG realized that in the area of WIN-GAD they had the same concerns as *Bantay Banay*, offering support and participation. The DILG

responded by holding trainings, allocating training funds and reaching out to barangay captains. It monitors the five percent local governments are supposed to spend supporting the WIN-GAD at the annual barangay council meetings. Information dissemination is promoted through the circulation of memos. An Inter-Agency Coordination Council (IACC) was also created for coordination and collaboration among members. The IACC was formed for full and complete representation in meetings. The *Bantay Banay* IACC provides support services such as shelters, organizing livelihood, counseling, training, legal literacy and family code orientation.

Government hospitals are at the forefront of focusing attention on women and child victims. Different NGOs and agencies held training and seminars on issues such as gender sensitivity, women's rights, physical/sexual abuse and domestic violence. The participants' attention and concern were echoed to their colleagues and staff. It was realized that interventions have to be more than medical and afflictions could be more than physical. While there used to be a tendency to medicalize problems, medical practitioners are now motivated to work with increased concern and interest. They provide their patients with more personalized treatment, personal care, interest and follow-ups. The hospitals became pilot sites for women and child protection units. Special "pink" and "violet" rooms have been established to provide the victims of physical and

sexual abuse with privacy and confidentiality while recognizing their need for treatment with sensitivity, counseling and immediate attention. Laboratory fees, medical certificates, examinations are free for these patients. The importance of issues like VAW, special pediatric care and child abuse are being institution-alized through integration in the curriculum. Involvement with *Bantay Banay* has effected a more holistic treatment of women and children in government hospitals through linkages and referrals.

Other NGO partners have integrated *Bantay Banay* in their programs, providing communities with seminars and training. These groups have innovated responses to community needs such as the establishment of Women's Centers in barangays, telephone counseling, home-based shelters and preventive measures like family home sessions to encourage open communication which has been effective. Legal partners like PIALO began by being assigned to Lihok Pilipina and handling criminal (rape and child abuse) and civil (declaration of nullity, legal support) cases. There are substantial numbers of sympathetic prosecutors and groups who are willing to help in preparing those needing legal services. There are groups that can provide support services. Because criminal legal fees are charged, legal services become more accessible to women, especially disadvantaged women. Legal assistance plays an important role in responding to women's issues.

Through participation and cooperation, the various organizations and agencies involved have learned that problems of domestic violence are better addressed by concerted effort. By recognizing expertise and building an effective system of referrals, coordination and support has been developed and has expanded each agency's ability to respond adequately and immediately to those in need. The ripple and multiplier effects can be seen in how training is passed down the line. Minimal resources are effectively coupled with maximized talent. Both as individuals and as members of groups, people are more motivated to work because of the mutual support and partnerships that have been established. Members take pride in their work when they see how survivors provide effective and inspiring models for victims.

Despite the prevalence of domestic violence and physical/sexual abuse of children and women, it was generally believed that domestic problems were private problems and that intervention was improper. These issues were addressed through discussion on the magnitude of the problem. In the community groups, all work is voluntary and motivated by the increasing awareness of the community residents. As one barangay captain put it, "An informed public is a dynamic one." Volunteers mediate during conflict, organize taskforces and manage livelihood programs. In mediating conflicts they follow a process of immediate response,

intervention (by staging a noise barrage to stop the violence or conflict) and local resolution of the problem. If local resolution is not possible, barangay officials and police are contacted to take over and referrals to partner groups made available. When conflicts require legal proceedings, volunteers launch court mobilization to provide moral support to victims by appearing in court. Other support systems include provision of child minding, temporary shelter services and hospitalization for victims, which are either free or paid for in kind.

The communities have used the organizing brought about by *Bantay Banay* to address other community concerns outside of gender and family issues. After establishing *Bantay Banay* in their communities, the groups enter economic ventures such as cooperatives with the realization that many problems originate from financial problems. Women especially are encouraged to put up small businesses. Most of these projects are self-financing initiatives and some groups use the income from their cooperatives to support *Bantay Banay* projects and improve community conditions. Their ability to organize themselves have also enabled women to participate in politics through advocacy. Some examples of their other activities are:

> Lobbying at the barangay level for the creation of a Women and Family Affairs Committee with corresponding budget allocation

> Supporting the 1996 anti-gambling campaign and the campaign for the anti-rape bill
> Participating as representatives in various national and international conferences
> Facilitation of an information drive and distribution of leaflets barangay-wide in order to minimize incidences of child abuse and domestic violence and to expand membership through the information campaign
> Following up of land tenure problems, lot acquisition, slum improvement, resettlement
> Infrastructural improvement such as cementing of footpaths and street lighting
> Provision of health and sanitation services — Clean and Green projects, water management schemes for water cooperatives, drainage systems, impounding of stray dogs
> Conducting watershed tours to promote environmental awareness

Continuous education and awareness programs are aimed at teaching the community conflict resolution and teaching the women to break the silence. These efforts have expanded into the creation of *Bantay Banay* youth groups, which introduce issues regarding children's rights awareness and child abuse. This is considered an essential component because of the large number of child victims and the need to educate the younger generation. The increasing awareness in communities has also led

to the attention and interest of local officials. Barangay officials were initially reluctant to support the project as it was seen as a political threat. But they later saw how *Bantay Banay* actually makes their work easier by implementing the law for them. Barangay captains now support the movement by providing funds for *Bantay Banay* projects, with some successfully tapping the private sector for resources and funding.

Bantay Banay has benefited both individuals and communities as a whole. Previously, communities were characterized by self-interest and self-preoccupation. Residents now report a feeling of true commitment, unity, and communal concern borne from a desire to help others. Their exposure to *Bantay Banay* showed them (the women specially) the importance of knowing one's rights and having the self-confidence to assert and fight for them. Legal literacy has become an important source of confidence and empowerment. Men have started attending the GST and its effectiveness is seen in greater partnership among spouses, men participating in household chores and parenting, equality in decision-making and resource management. Furthermore, traditional perspectives on disciplining wives and children are changing along with traditional perceptions of gender and motherhood. Single motherhood is being reconceptualized as single mothers strive to become models of successful living and survival. The stigma and shame of single motherhood has diminished through community support and acceptance. Community members and leaders point to drugs as another problem that has emerged but can only be dealt with in limited ways.

The multidimensional approach of *Bantay Banay* to the problem of domestic violence and VAW illustrates how social change can and must take place simultaneously and on multiple levels so that successes are affirmed and legitimized. Changing the definitions perpetuating inequality is being accomplished by involving communities and civil society. Education and the everyday practice of gender awareness are making it a part of cultural values, slowly supplanting the previously limiting strictures on gender. The involvement of influential people and key leaders gives credence to the importance of gender concerns and facilitates the propagation of awareness among community members. Options for women created through establishment of community support has had a two-fold benefit. It gives women victims a greater chance of survival because of the subsiding stigma and it promotes a sense of community among those involved. The involvement of the state and other agencies institutionalizes women's issues and gender concerns, allowing domestic violence into the public sphere and thereby making it an issue that can be acted upon and recognized before the law. The structural changes being enforced through policies and programs are setting the stage for more gender-sensitive and gender-aware

Definitely, the transformation is not yet complete. There are obstacles yet to be surmounted—such as the replication of the project's successes on a nationwide scale. Nevertheless, it is heartening to see that as the values, beliefs and behaviors are changing the surrounding conditions, the positively changing conditions likewise impose positive changes in values, beliefs and behaviors.

The multisectoral alliances present in this multidimensional initiative demonstrates not only the possibility that social phenomena can be transformed but that it can be transformed successfully. The process-changing constructions and realities have led to the slowly increasing acceptance of new models and meanings.

NOTES

[1] Human Development Index, United Nations Development Programme, 1998.

[2] Department of Social Welfare and Development, 1998.