

Redefining Gender Equality from the Context of Culture

Venus A. Solar^{1*} Carlo P. Garcia²

1. Manila Central University, Research and Development Center, Edsa, Caloocan City 1400, Manila, Philippines

2. Miriam College, Katipunan, Quezon City, Philippines

*Email: ven_nervegate@yahoo.com

The research is financed by Manila Central University, Research and Development Center

Abstract

Social media reports that the Philippines is the only country in Asia entered the top countries with best gender equality in the world. Also included in the top ten are countries like Iceland, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Ireland, New Zealand, Denmark, Switzerland, and Lesotho. Doubtful with this report, the researchers made an intersectional analysis on culture and gender participation in the society. The purpose is to awaken the public that the equal rate of gender economic participation in the society does not equate to gender equality and that the Philippines is still under the shadow of male domination despite of the claim that Philippines ranked 8th in the 2011 Global Gender Gap Report. The socio-cultural merit of this study is to push the gender equality promoters to deeply examine their measurement index in assessing gender equality. Measurement index should be based on cultural contextual realities and not on quantity base gender participation.

Keywords: culture, gender equality, intersectional analysis

1. Introduction

Traditionally, in rural areas, women stay and work in house and care their children where men do most of the farming and building constructions. In urban areas, women work in line with services like teaching, clerical works and other domestic works while men work in line with industry that involves manufacturing, machinery, maintenance, business and construction. The above mentioned division of labour by gender is a cultural practice in the Philippines since 1960's.

Today, though the Philippine female employment level has narrowed down the gap between male employments rates as reported by the Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum of 2011, quantity should not be the sole basis for gender equality. The researcher challenges the idea that gender equality should be analyzed base on the cultural transition and changes in the structural context of the community to reveal the authentic condition of gender equality in a country.

2. Methods

An intersectional analysis was used in the study to describe the real scenario of gender equality in the Philippines and an ideology theory was used in redefining the concept of gender equality. All the secondary data used for contextual and review analyses were obtained from the historical data chart of the Trading Economic website in the Philippines, from the 2011 World Bank Report from Geneva Economic Forum,

from the International Labor Organization, the United Nations Development Program and from the World Health Organization.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

The Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum measures gender inequality gap in terms of health and survival, political empowerment, educational attainment and economic participation. However, these four dimensions were utilized only to measure the number of participating gender in the society and failed to interpret the contextual realities behind each dimension. Gender equality and culture must be intertwined in order to trace and unravel the true morphological scenario of a society.

3.1 Defining Gender Equality and Culture

Gender equality is a social order in which women and men share the same opportunity on full participation in both the economic and the domestic realm (Diezmann and Grieshaber, 2010). Whereas, culture is defined as a shared and learned system of values, beliefs and attitudes that shapes and influences perception and behavior (Lewis, 2008). Extracting our perspective from these two definitions, it is clearly observed that the definition of gender equality is not anchored within the context of culture. One way to assess equality is to link it with the cultural values, attitudes and behavior of people in the society. By describing the cultural changes based on the attitude and behavior of people, we can visibly trace the shifting of people's values and thinking on how they perceive gender equality in their community

3.2 Redefining Gender Equality

It is suggested that the definition of gender equality should originate from the context of culture to have a clear basis of measurement because gender equality is not just about opportunities and participation in the economy but rather about the worthiness of role of each individual in the society. Gender equality is about the decency of work and not just about high compensation rate, a dignified work that heightens the moral of the individual, and a kind of niche for everyone that is free from discrimination, abuse and over exploitation. These are supposed to be the skeletal bases or the working framework of the Global Gender Gap World Economic organizers in establishing parameters in measuring gender equality.

Thereby, to synergize gender equality with culture, gender equality should be defined *as a socio-cultural order in which women and men share the same system of values, belief and attitudes transcended with fairness in opportunities and participation of both genders in the economic and domestic realm.*

3.3. Gender Equality Measurement Index

3.3.1. Educational attainment and economic participation

The researchers proposed that education and economic participation should not be used as measurement indexes, to support the argument, the researchers compared and analysed the historical data chart of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) from 1998 to 2008. Data shows that the unemployment rate of female with tertiary education is 44.6, whereas, male is 36.5. These data revealed that females have lower economic participation compared to male despite of the fact that females have higher educational attainment. This clearly indicates that educational attainment does not equate to employment opportunities.

Another evidence that gender equality gap is continuously rising is due to the increase in the deployment of female Filipinos for overseas work. It was in the year 1970s when the Philippine government started deploying Filipinos for overseas work, and year 2004 when Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) deployment

breached the one-million-a-year mark, and by 2009, the number reached almost two million (Fabros, 2011). Based on the recorded data of National Statistics Office Survey of Overseas Filipinos, though women make nearly half of the overseas workers, Filipina migrant workers end up in low-skilled or unskilled occupations. In 2009, thirty two percent (32%) of female overseas workers are labourers, whereas, in males, only eleven percent (11.1%) worked as labourers and unskilled workers. This constitutes more than half of females worked as labourers and unskilled workers. Based on the report of the Philippine Foreign Service from year 1992 to 2002, there were 1, 084 cases of human trafficking, most of them were women who leave the country as entertainers, fiancées of foreign nationals, service workers, tourists or undocumented workers fall victim to organized crime syndicates.

If we were to dissect the data, unskilled labour signifies inadequate competencies, a kind of job that is very vulnerable to any kind of abuse and over exploitation. In Philippine cultural context, unskilled job is associated to a traditional household work. In the Philippines, though domestic helpers are modestly compensated, they are treated as family members in their work place and not just a paid employee, this is because of the close family ties of Filipino culture. However, when domestic helpers work abroad, though they are highly compensated, the number of reported cases of abuse is highly manifested, this is due to the low class cultural perception of people among domestic helpers abroad.

Talking about conservative norms and traditional values, Vatican and Philippines are the only countries in the world that do not embrace the concept of divorce. Filipino people still treasures the sacredness of relationships among married couples. As a result, those Filipino women and men who work as entertainers abroad are easily discriminated and labelled as immoral people, regardless of their high compensation rate.

What makes an occupation highly dignified and highly valuable is not merely on the rate of compensation but rather on how people take in the job with joy that portrays intellectual or uniqueness of skill. And what makes the job classified as low-skilled work is due to the perception that unskilled workers are not rare to find and does not need expertise to learn the job, hence, they are compensated only on the basis of quantity of products they produce and not base on the quality of their output as by product of their intellectual and unique skill. Therefore, it is suggested that the Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum should base their measurement index in terms of number of employment opportunities aligned to the specific skills and expertise offered up for women and men abroad.

3.3.2. Health and Survival

Health and survival rate as measurement indicators should not be a basis in measuring gender equality because men and women physiological mechanisms are biologically designed to respond differently to environmental stress. Men and women are innately born with different adaptation system that can be weakly altered by culture. In the article written by Laura Blue, published in 2008 in Time Health Magazine, neurologically, physiologically, and genetically, females have more diverse biological mechanisms that can strategize to abate the occurrence of cancer and prolong aging, thus, life expectancy related to survival has no congruency within the gender cultural context and gender participation in the economic and domestic realm (Bailyn, 2006).

3.3.3. Political Empowerment

In the Philippines, though 17.2% of all the legislative seats are occupied by women, still thousands of women are discriminated by virtue of marriage, parenthood and property ownership. There were a total of 1, 100 to 7, 383 reported cases of physical injuries, wife battering and rape recorded by the Philippine National Police from 1996 to 2004 and a total of 6, 679 cases involving violence against women were recorded in 2007. The highest record was in 2001 at 10, 343 (Annan, 2000). Though there were already more than 37 existing Philippine Laws on Women, still it indicates that the women legislative officials are

weak in creating and imposing women rights laws in the Philippines. This suggests that political empowerment in the Philippines is weak, though political empowerment as measurement index can also be used, however, the absence or occurrence of women abuse in the society is more important as measurement tool in quantifying gender equality gap and not on the number of programs and women's laws written in the constitution.

So, what should be done? Social scientists should conduct a meta-analysis through systematic review methodology and longitudinal study in order to trace and analyse the impact on the transitional changes in the shifting of men and women gender role in the society. Social psychologists should evaluate the behaviour of men on the context of women empowerment in the society.

As obviously observed, as men become more aware on the context of women empowerment, the diversity of abuse among women becomes predominant, in effect, more laws on women were created to address the different cases of abuse. Why is it, when the concept of women empowerment was introduced in the society, the abuse among women becomes more diverse, and the creation of laws on women right protection increases?

One conceptual assumption to this scenario is that men do not yet fully embrace the cultural changes in the shifting of gender role in the society. This could be the effect of premature instauration of women empowerment that is manifested through male's rebellion or a cultural stigma that is diverted in a very deceptive form. All that were mentioned remains assumptions unless proven through thorough investigations and deep studies on the Philippine culture.

As a general concluding statement, the researchers proposed that there should be an input and output parameters as basis for measurement. In measuring gender economic participation, indicators should show that the higher the rate of employment the lower the rate of reported case of abuse, that educational attainment should be congruent to the kind of job opportunities and the rate of compensation should equate the decency of work (Figure 1).

4. Future Direction

It is strongly recommended that the promoters of gender equality should have a specific program or advocacy on how to transform the socio-cultural attitude of men towards women. The committee on gender equality program for women should be spearheaded by men in order for them to deeply understand the contextual realities on the climatic change in the shifting of gender role in the society. The term 'women empowerment' should also be changed because the word 'empowerment' connotes hunger for higher authority over a weaker entity, hence, it contradicts the concept of equality.

References

- Annan, K. (2000). "Violence against Women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace." New York, 5-9.
- Bailyn, (2006). *Breaking the mold: Redesigning work for productive and satisfying lives*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell.
- Diezmann, C. & Grieshaber, S. (2010). Gender equity in the professoriate: A cohort study of new women professors in Australia. In M. Devlin, J. Nagy and A. Lichtenberg (Eds.) *Research and Development in Higher Education: Reshaping Higher Education*, 33 (pp. 223-234). Melbourne, 6-9 July, 2010.
- Lewis, J. (2008). *Preserving our Future. The role of Elders in the cultural resilience of Native communities*
- Xavier Sala-i-Martin (2010) *The Global Competitiveness Report 2010-2011* World Economic Forum Geneva, Switzerland

Web Source

- <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/> (2012)
- <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/philippines/indicators> (2012)
- <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/philippines/employment-to-population-ratio-15-plus--female-percent-wb-data.html> (2012)
- <http://worldwidescience.org/topicpages/l/labour+market+participation.html> (August 2011)
- <http://www.weforum.org/>
- http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2010-11.pdf

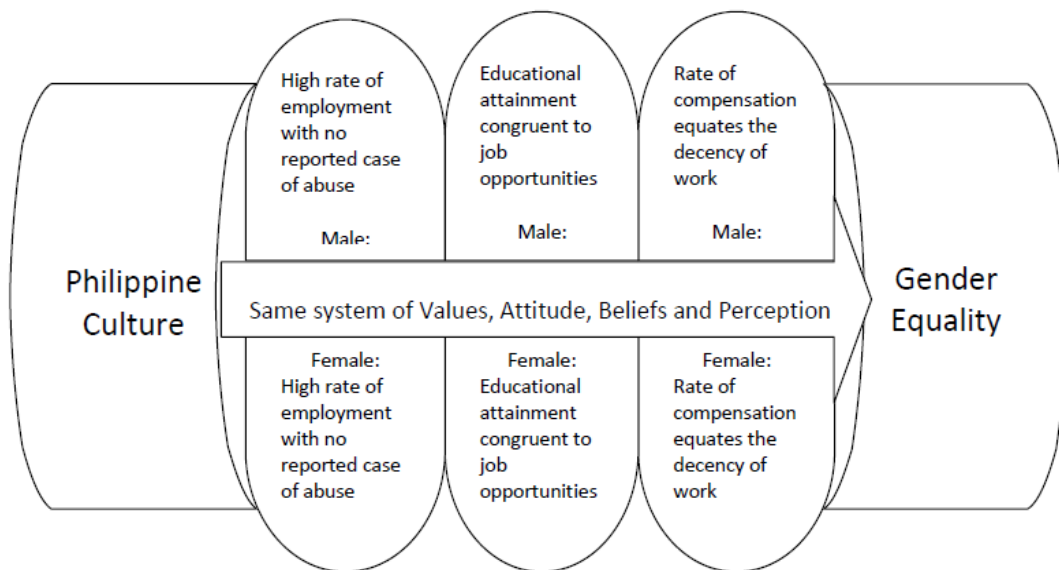


Figure 1: Proposed Bases for Gender Equality Measurement Index

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:**

<http://www.iiste.org/Journals/>

The IISTE editorial team promises to review and publish all the qualified submissions in a fast manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

