

PROGRAM ON ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Towards a Feminist Policy Analysis Framework

Assessing Gender Policies in the Philippines

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Introduction

The Philippines is recognized as one of the most gender-equal countries globally, ranking 20th out of 148 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report in 2025. Ranked third in the Asia Pacific, it is a consistent leader in gender equality in the region (PCW 2025). This is attributed mostly to the enactment of policies that defend and promote women's rights beginning in the 1990s. In general, these policies can be categorized into legislation that a) provide frameworks for gender equality, b) address gender-based violence, c) affirm reproductive health rights, d) recognize women's economic rights, and e) challenge cultural and family practices. Most notable among these are: ¹

- Republic Act 7192: Women in Development and Nation-Building Act (1992)
- Republic Act 7322: Increasing Maternity Benefits in Favor of Women Workers in the Private Sectors
- Republic Act 7877: Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995
- Republic Act 8353: The Anti-Rape Law of 1997

- Republic Act 9208: Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 (expanded 2022)
- Republic Act 9262: Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004
- Republic Act 9710: The Magna Carta of Women (2009)
- Republic Act 9775: Anti-Child Pornography Act of 2009
- Republic Act 10354: The Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012
- Republic Act No. 10361: Domestic Workers Act or *Batas Kasambahay* (2013)
- Republic Act 11313: Safe Spaces Act (2019)
- Republic Act 11596: An Act Prohibiting the Practice of Child Marriage and Imposing Penalties for Violations Thereof (2022)

The successful reshaping of the Philippine policy landscape on women and gender can be attributed to two factors. The first was the presence of a dynamic women's and feminist movement that initiated, drove, and ensured many of these policy reforms. In reframing issues of women

¹ For a more complete list of policies on women and gender in the Philippines, please visit <https://pcw.gov.ph/republic-acts-2/>.

and gender, the movement provided the political analysis, theory, and organization to advance specific legislation. The second factor was the mobilization of broader grassroots and multi-sectoral networks. The intense national debates that characterized some policy deliberations pointed to the emergence of clear social cleavage. The involvement of these coalitions demonstrated that there was public support for policy change to secure the passage of highly contested legislation.

Since the approval of these policies in the 1990s and 2000s, ample time has passed to merit a fair assessment of some of these laws, which have been implemented for more than 10 to 20 years. In recent years, evaluations of policies on gender-based violence have been undertaken pointing to barriers to their implementation (Valdez et al. 2022; CHR 2019). Any assessment, however, must go beyond a cost-benefit analysis to integrate an analysis of gender and power. A feminist policy analysis aims to make women visible by examining “*how women and men are treated differently or the same; the underlying assumptions and stereotypes of women embedded in policy; and how women’s lives and roles are regulated and constrained by policy*” (McPhail 2003, 44). Moreover, policy analysis must attend to the context and “real world” in which women live by understanding their economic, social, and political realities. The ultimate goal of feminist policy analysis is shifting power differentials towards achieving gender equality and justice (McPhail 2003; Hawkesworth 1994).

Feminist Policy Assessment: Some Questions²

Taking note of the above, here are some questions to ask in assessing policies on women and gender. These questions touch on specific aspects of policy implementation while integrating more structural and contextual issues that shape the outcomes of policy.

Recognition and Inclusion of Women and Other Marginalized Sectors

- How are women along with other marginalized groups recognized and included in the policy? Which women are included? Are women

seen as victims, agents, community members, community leaders, consumers and/or users in the context of the policy?

- Does policy see women occupy traditional (as wives, caregivers, administrators, etc.) and non-traditional gender roles (as heads of families, managers, community leaders, etc.)?
- Have gender-diverse individuals, indigenous people, people with disabilities, elderly people, young people, and people in marginalized sectors been recognized and included? How?

Implementation

- What are the positive outcomes or results arising from the implementation of policy for women, men, and gender-diverse individuals?
- What factors influence the effective implementation and success of policy at the different levels of governance and implementation (service providers, police, social welfare, courts, barangays, local government units, national agencies, independent commissions, and so on)?
- What are the barriers to the effective implementation of policy at the different levels of governance and implementation?
- What accommodations were made to facilitate the inclusion of diverse and marginalized people (accessible location, transportation, childcare, translation, legal and other social support, etc.)?
- What deviations have been taken in the enactment of policy at different levels of governance and implementation? What are the reasons for this and how have it impacted women, men, and gender-diverse individuals?
- What roles do women, men, and gender-diverse individuals have in shaping and implementing policy? Where do we find women, men, and gender-diverse individuals in the policy process, from formulation to the many levels of implementation and across institutions – and to what extent do they participate in agenda-setting, evaluation, and decision-making?

² These questions were inspired and derived from the discussion in the articles by Hawkesworth (1994) ; McPhail (2003) Abrar, Lovenduski, and Margetts (2000) ; and Manning (2014).

- How do gender norms, culture, and power affect the interpretation and implementation of policy across institutions as well as various governance levels?
- How have gender power and sex role expectations structured the organizational processes of regulatory, distributive, and redistributive agencies that implement gender policy?
- How has gender structured operational routines and administrative practices and in what ways has it oriented and directed the daily bureaucratic implementation of policy?
- Who monitors the long-term impact of policy? How can women, men, gender-diverse individuals, other marginalized groups, and the public be involved?
- Who are the people and institutions accountable for the outcomes of policy? How do institutions address lack of accountability in the implementation of policy?

Equity and Justice

- How has policy vision and implementation reflected differential treatment of women, men, gender-diverse persons, and marginalized groups? What are the differential impacts and benefits of policy on women, men and gender-diverse individuals, especially those in marginalized and lower social classes?
- To what extent has policy responded to unique needs associated with women's well-being and autonomy?
- In what ways has the implementation of policy caused undue burden on women, gender-diverse individuals, and marginalized groups? Who bears the cost of policy implementation?
- In what ways has policy retained certain gender privileges for men and gender disadvantages for women, gender-diverse individuals, and other marginalized groups?
- How has policy addressed, in terms of substance and practice, "benign" gender discrimination and long histories of invidious discrimination?
- To what extent has policy, in substance and practice, advanced feminist objectives of egalitarian relationships, non-hierarchical systems, reduction of women's economic dependence on men, reduction of gender inequalities in income and leisure time, prevention of poverty, redistribution of resources, as well as economic justice?

Power and Discourse

- How has policy shifted the terms of debate and discourse on specific gender issues?
- What kind of subjectivities have been created by policy? What kind of "victim," "agent," or "perpetrator" has been produced by policy? What are its implications for women's agency and empowerment as well as male involvement?
- What paternalistic and patriarchal assumptions about the nature of gender remain embedded in policies?
- In the implementation of policy, what criteria are used to assess accounts of women and gender-diverse individuals?
- In the practice of policy, how have dominant conceptions of objectivity shaped the assessment of accounts or narratives of women, men, and gender-diverse individuals?
- Have there been policy or guideline reversals related to gender and what would account for this? Has there been a backlash, related to policy or guidelines, because of approval of a gender-related policy?
- How has policy affected or shaped other policies or institutional practices, specific to gender and otherwise? How are policies interconnected with each other.

Policy Improvements

- What aspects of policy need to be strengthened, changed, or removed?
- What is required to enable policy improvements?

Questions for Reflections

- Has policy resulted in transformation of communities and policymakers? How has it challenged dominant systems of power and knowledge?
- Taking lessons from experience, how does incremental change lead to more structural change?
- What are the limitations of policy reform as a social movement or feminist strategy?

In asking these questions, feminist policy analysis takes an interpretive approach. It opens a lens that focuses on how women, gender diverse people and other communities engage with policy. At the same time, it creates space for the interrogation of the multiple meanings that policy holds for those whose lives have been affected by it. This is different from a technocratic approach to policy analysis that assumes policy processes are linear, logical and hierarchical.

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