

## **Indigenous Women in the Philippines and its Combat to Injustice: A Channel for Women's Reinforcement Operation**

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**Abstract**—The study was conducted to determine the experiences of oppression, discrimination, inequality, and injustices have done against women and the roots and consequences of the factors that deprived them for asserting their rights. During the Spanish regime, literatures about the status of Filipino women times, they have experienced exploitation. Filipino women did not join and share ideas or participate in the decision making about issues in the society. They tilled the land with their husbands as peasants for pittance. Women stayed as inferior to men, not only to men but by institutions, races and people in this world.

The study was a pathway for women's movement or organizations to create and improve campaign advocacies or policies for women's empowerment and development. The focus of the research work concerned the indigenous women in the Philippines. Studies have looked into it the indigenous women suffered from discrimination, subordination and inequality from dominant culture in the society. There were also other factors suffered by women like the abuses of the believed patriarchal society in the country. The aspects on deprivation of their rights in political activities, economic living and social representation had been denied to them by prevailing culture, sectors, institution, and government or by the male power dominance in their areas. Some group had complained that the imperialist globalization considered or as factor to be the breed of injustice.

These findings exposed the risks being experienced by these indigenous women as a result of the conditions or situations that affect their cultural, political, economic and social well-being. Such reports considered to be alarming issues that should examine or give attention to by the government agencies, women's group, local government units and other concerned organizations in developing programs or projects to remedy the different situation.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies have been conducted to enunciate the oppression, subordination, discrimination and exploitation against women in the society. The matter of contentions such as rape, sex trafficking, prostitution, and torture have been a problem and a challenge for the creation of women's movement or organization in different places to provide the battle against abuses and the establishment of empowerment were continually done to our women. Violence against

women is a serious problem in the Philippines and it's still pervasive at this time. Cases reported by different agencies on the numerous violence against women increased from 1,100 in 1996 to 7,383 in 2004, a total of 5,758 cases reported to police authority and it increased to 21% by the year 2008 from the 2007 report. The intensity happened not only in the urban areas, a study conceived by several non-governmental organizations started by Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organization (WEDPRO) said the remote areas like in rural areas are becoming the choice of setting for sex traffickers and prostitution syndicates. Many responses from different organizations have been promulgated to fight domestic violence, sexual harassment and other injustices committed against women.

The reasons or causes of abuses have been answered but many recommendations also of previous studies are still hoping for continuous actions to support women against oppression. Since other studies focused on the abuses of women in different places in the country, there are initial studies focusing also on the indigenous women and recommendations for the social, economic and cultural representation of the said group in the Philippines. The widespread of empowerment principles turned to the effective participation of ethnic, rural and urban poor women for the state to attain a more democratic and just governance. Many women's groups emerged in our nation and they are organized into federations or networks. During the eighties, "militant women's groups addressed their concerns and issues in the context of nationalist agenda for genuine agrarian reform, nationalist industrialization, peace with justice and others." The state was seen favoring foreign capitalists and local elite at the expense of rural and urban poor women. Through the eighties, there were campaigning against militarization of the countryside, the proliferation of anti communist vigilante groups and war-related sexual crimes took much of the time and energies of progressive women activists (Sobtrichea 1996:99).

The researcher tries to seek for advocacies to balance the rights and protection also of indigenous women in the country. Specifically, this study seeks to know more and answer the needs to understand the group and be able to develop strong policies for them for situations that are injustice to them. The researcher planned to investigate on the topic about their experiences on injustices. The

researcher examined the factors that deprived them to execute their rights, norms, culture and different aspects that benefit their living. This will include their struggles and experiences due to violence from different sectors, government, organizations or individuals.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Rosario del Rosario in her feature about "In Search of a Theory of Filipino Women's Oppression," discovered different theories on women suffering but not all Filipinos will agree that there is an abuse, oppression or subordination because they are women under male culture. From the liberal feminist's point of view, they identify the cause of women's inequality as "sexism". They explain that they have a lesser status for the reason of discrimination and society's sexist that exists including the shortfall of socioeconomic and political chance of women to be equal with men. Rosario showed Friedrich Engel's *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1977) that provided a signature to the "cause of women's oppression.

It was Friedrich Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1977) that gave a name to the cause of women's oppression by describing "the world historic defeat of the female sex" relative to the development of private property." On the other hand, Marxists believe the women have been impaired to gender and class oppression in society. Not only women but, both men and women are experiencing exploitation by capitalism. They point out also that the system of capitalism is the real competitor of the subordination and exploitation of women's reproduction and production. Rosario found theory from Lenin (1966 cited in Pineda-Ofreño, Narciso-Apan, and Estrada-Claudio 1997), he saw "the necessity of removing whatever oppresses and harasses the working woman, the wife of the worker, the peasant woman, the wife of little man, and even in many respects the woman of the "woman" question. He included that man must participate to solve the problems of women question. Another point of view from the radical feminists, they said that the term "patriarchy or male power is a monolithic, unproblematic entity, attaining an universal and natural status as the single cause of women's oppression." Nevertheless radical feminists contend that biology is destiny, for them, gender oppression can only be stop if women also reject heterosexual relationship like family and create their very own culture, ruin men hierarchies and continue to liberate women from physical burden etc. Rosario also examines theory of socialist feminists; they said history constructed that patriarchy and society. From Rosario's article (Jaggar 1983:160), some believe the women suffer to both class and gender oppression. They examine male constructed that the capitalist system and that male dominance is started by the capitalist division of labor.

From Rosario's words, "Lerner looks on Engels' merit in focusing on the impact of societal and cultural forces on structuring and defining sexual relations, he broke with the biological determinism of the traditionalists, reinforced the linkage among economic-social change and gender relations, and defined monogamous marriage as the subjection of one sex by the other." From Hilsdon's notes (Rosario), he wrote

that first world feminisms tend toward regard third world women in considering positions as victims who are completely exploited victimized especially in a culture of terror and violence...(1995:186). In the Philippines, feminism has a different notion. According to the author, political and economic issues oftentimes classify "the wider personal needs and desires of women and the privatized oppressions of women by men may be perceived as secondary."

Some Filipino feminists' look that Filipinas have been marginalized in activities of production, manufacturing that resulted to the use of women as cheapest labor in entertainment, tourism and commercialized sex destinations as explicated by the author. And it all resulted to devastation of their society because of colonial and neocolonial policies. A study has been investigated related to the topic about Philippines indigenous cultural groups that have relatively been "less" colonized has been indicated by the author. They have looked for issues on patriarchy and from different perceptions of Western women about women's oppression in indigenous women. There have been initial researches on women particularly Cordillera women. Juline Dulnuan, contends that "in traditional Cordillera society, woman is free to express to initiate courtship, marriage and even divorce. She is in control of her body and her can make a choice, have gained access to property, and they share productions and reproduction work within their men." An Ibaloi feminist Victoria Tumbaga in her master's thesis, she examined it by life stories the oppression of indigenous poor women migrants in the city of Baguio and determines that "their gender, ethnicity, and migrant urban-poor status make them the most oppressed sector in the city." Poverty is the main issue of these women and the author gave the questions on the issue of survival, production and other problems of economic living from their male counterparts. There are many theories that explain the foundation of oppression and inequality between women and these theories will reserve as the foundation of the researcher's study whether it happen to be the history of colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy or other factors or the combined factors these oppressed women in the pervasive time.

## III. DISCUSSION

Indigenous women like the peasant women centered their lives on the land, to till, to develop, and to manage for their survival. It's their right to self-determination in controlling their own ancestral lands, in their own path of development. The Innabuyog regional alliance of indigenous women in the Cordillera explained that disintegration is happening because of structure of imperialist that tends to get their land and resources and it seems that globalization try to erode now on their feet. To give statistics of indigenous women in Asia, there are more than 75 million about 50% of indigenous population in the region. They give importance to agricultural production, and they are experiencing economic and social problems. They experienced institutionalized discrimination that women racism from the superior culture imposed by the states, at the hands of landlords or employers. According to Zenaida Soriano, land is ultimately owned by politicians and big businesspeople. So the peasant women

had no choice but to work as tenants and depend on sharecropping. It gives way to the feudal system of the Philippines that subjugate women to poverty. Indigenous women stayed at a place of feudal-patriarchal societies which says the women are inferior to men. In this kind of culture, indigenous women are usually considered being a child-bearer, being a maid to her father, her brothers and her family. Women were also excluded from political activities; they cannot hold positions of leadership in their village. Forces of neo-liberal globalization at the turn of the 21st century have eroded and violated the rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people as seen by the organization.

A participatory research on peasant women was conducted by Maureen Pagaduan. "Poverty in the countryside weighs heavily on women and men alike." The experience of underdevelopment by agricultural sector leads to the desolation of livelihood of the rural. In their struggle for survival, it can be said the women and men are in equal standing. However poverty weighs heavy on the peasant women, especially it's their responsibility to improve the family income. The findings situated by Pagaduan were on the agricultural production, domestic reproduction and the subordination of women. The findings situated by Pagaduan were on the agricultural production, domestic reproduction and the subordination of women. She said that "woman's work is only supplementary to that of the man or a mere extension of that of her husband." There's a principle that "biologically founded that woman is biologically weak." "The preservation of the feudal mode of production carries with it such concepts as family labor and sex preference at work that are utterly discriminatory of women's work." As a result, women's abilities to earn are only limited and they remain dependent on men and society. They are considered as secondary workers in non-domestic work, and they end showing a very flexible reserve labor force. Thus the equivalent work, a woman exerts is not given due consideration. Women become completely dependent on men and society because their capacities are significantly hampered. "The non-participation of peasant women and their recognition as a labor force in the domestic production, all the more ties them down to household work," only recognizing and giving them a limited view of the world. They cannot completely join to participate in agricultural production because they are first expected to execute domestic work. Their decisions are only applicable in home. From the words of the author, men and women as well as the communities have been culturally conditioned to accept that women's role in domestic work is something "normal," one that can be taken for granted. All these have their foundation in the family, in traditions, beliefs and institution. "Patriarchal family relations and the socialization of male and female into different roles have their most fundamental expression at the level of the home." The role of childbearing has been the mark for the association of peasant women with other domestic tasks related to care of the household. Sexual domination and subordination print the power relations among peasant men and women in our nation. "Male sexual domination is viewed as supportive of an economic arrangement in society defined by the prevailing

organization of production and reproduction." So it's followed by a paternalistic relationship between landlord and peasant.

These conditions have opened the door for aggression and militarization in their ancestral lands and culture and the group feel the threat for their survival as distinct people. "The impositions of imperialist globalization are exacerbating the disadvantaged position of indigenous women. Impacts of globalization on indigenous women are profound and far-reaching, disrupting the important roles they play as productive forces in society, as child-bearers, as nurturers of the family, and as vital members of indigenous communities." Imperialist globalization made tracks for alienation, privatization, commercialization and theft of community forests, lands, waters etc. resulting to insufficiency to indigenous women and children. Forms of tourism make indigenous women display them to commercialization to prostitution and sex trafficking as the results. "Wages of women in agriculture remain 14% below that of their male counterpart." Soriano noted also that "women are not represented in the government, not consulted when economic, social and political decisions affecting them are being taken, and very often sexually abused." The group attempted to demand economic justice but they complained that the movement has been resisted by the state through the influence of a powerful state.

In Abel ISOH's *The Role of the National Federation of Peasant Women of the Philippines in the Struggle for Change*, as the article put it, they are fighting poverty and marginalization. The peasant women, under the shade of the National Federation of Peasant Women of the Philippines, have been demanding for genuine land reforms. As the author put it in an objective of women's emancipation, Zenaida Soriano shared that woman are not represented in the government, not being consulted when the economic, social and political decisions affecting them and time after time they were sexually abused. In the article, the author said that the country is a "semi-colony" of the United States of America. This was because the country has invested huge capital. There had been several attempts committed by the Philippine peasantry to demand economic justice but unfortunately the groups have been resisted by the state because of the influence of a powerful country. The Philippine economy is dominated by multinationals and it is in the scheme with local capitalists. That's why the Amihan is compelling the government to fend off external influences. Nevertheless the organization still encountered economic and social problems such as the lack of funds to finance their projects they wanted to work on, the "mechanization of agriculture and dumping of foreign goods in the Philippines" that affected the peasants. So the outcome is that local product become expensive. And some of the policies and laws passed by carried out as the case of rampant rape of women is blamed on the women themselves because of the reason that they "dress amorously."

For the Cordillera region on the indigenous women and development studied by Sylvia H. Guerrero et al. in their *Women and Gender in Population and Development*, they have revealed two views on gender relations indigenous

communities. Some have asserted the presence of gender oppression in the Cordillera and some are explaining the opposite. According to Geraldine Fiagoy, “gender oppression can be attributed to internal as well as external factors as acceptable cultural practices.” Cordillera women are placed in a minor place for the reason of cultural biases. She noted that male offspring have always been preferred over females. In the traditional political structures like the bodong (peace pact) or ator (council of elders,) the women have no active voice or participation in the decision-making of policy or concern issues. The Ifugao tradition of gender is being transformed in an ideology treating women as an inferior to the society. Women especially those who identified themselves as most affected due to the lack of access to fertile land did not acquire their traditional rights of access to swidden land.

Teresita Oliveros in her literature about the Impact of New World Trade Regime on Peasant Women in the Philippines explains that globalization and the new trade regime imposed by the World Trade Organization have devastating impact on the peasant women. She said that there's an unequal sharing of agricultural resources since the Philippines is a feudal agrarian, pre-industrial economic with feudalistic structure of its economy and its Reasons. There is an 8.5 million from the labor force are landless. She included that in the tenancy system, a 70/30 and 60/40 in sharing scheme is in favor of the landlord. “The labor of the women and the children is both not accounted and paid.” The lands are planted with export and commercial crops these only landlords, bureaucrats and capitalists are benefited in this area. The women are to till the land rocky uplands for the survival of their family not only in lands but also in non-agricultural works. Like the other groups or movements in their experiences and study on women, they are burdened with household or housework. Oliveros mentions that the imposition of the world trade system means exploitation to the peasants and their families. One example she expressed is in the 1960s to 1970s agricultural lands planted with cash crops to answer the huge demands of international market. So the huge profits collect up the landlords, the exploitation of the peasant women, men and their children exacerbated. When demand falls fast, the peasant with their families suffered deprivation and poverty. This changing of crops to meet the needs of international markets provides greater difficulty for peasant women and their families. There's the presence of landlessness and a threat to food security. The government, the Department of Agrarian Reform and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, obviously makes a part in “defrauding and criminalizing peasants to eject them from their lands.” Both landlords and government have taken part in grasping land from farmers and offering them for lease to foreign multinational investors. Landlords, government and foreign investors jumped to fraud or deception by military use or the Philippine National Police hired or sometimes mercenaries. All these explain the situation of indigenous women and roots that deprived them to practice their social, economical, and political activities may put down into culture of male-power dominance or patriarchal society and the globalizations as shown in below.

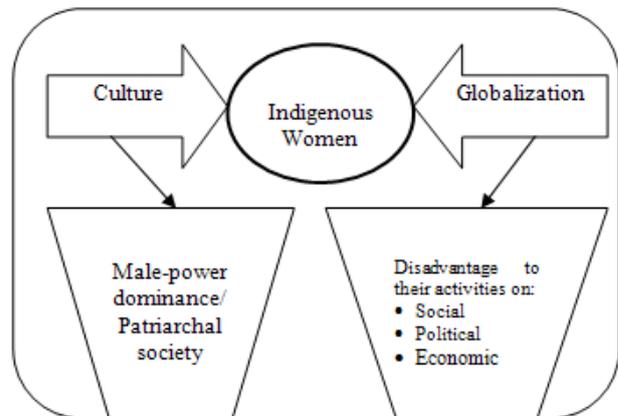


Figure 1.

On the left side of the box, this only explains that it can be on about culture that deprived indigenous women as explained in my discussion above these dominated women from men in just following the culture or beliefs on their group. On the other hand, globalization is seen to be the roots of all sufferings that slipped their participation in politics, their production and reproduction under economics and other social representation.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Women's movement must continue to join and attain the goals for equality and empowerment among women. Women under oppression must speak and their voices must be heard. The already constructed policies must be strengthened and political movements must formulate policies to the particular group. The law requires a process of informed consultation and written consent by the indigenous group to allow mining on tribal lands and assigns indigenous groups the responsibility to preserve their domains from environmentally inappropriate development imposed by different institutions that may crash their rights, principles, norms and culture. Since the government was slow to implement the legislation because of opposition from agribusiness interests, some limited that progress was made and it must not stop here. The funding of other groups is also the important assistance. These concerned, groups must provide different strategies and methods of skills to combat injustices experienced by women in rural areas to build a good foundation for improvement. Education, training, convention and seminar must be started by agencies, women's group, local government unit to come up with understanding their issues of the roots and effects of oppression and their struggle and to educate them. The study of their culture is also important and the realization and reflection of different solutions to provide the means of salvation. Psychological care and support, campaigns, community activism, community-based projects, legal and policy responses and international treaties must be established as part of saving and protecting indigenous women in the society.

GABRIELA, as the leading organization in waging anti Violence against Women, in their views, they fight different forms of violence against women, and the group to fight for the change of the feudal patriarchal system that pervades in the country. "And since the semi-feudal economy keep most of our people in bondage and poverty, many more women and children will suffer." There must be an organization of peasant women and women farmers and their families. They must continue to assert their rights to the land, resist eviction and militarization or "creating conditions for lightening of our workloads in the fields and at home through self-help systems and strengthening labor-exchange practices, organization is the most effective weapon according to Oliveros. They must discuss their contentions and problems to bring an analysis on issues and create plans for it.

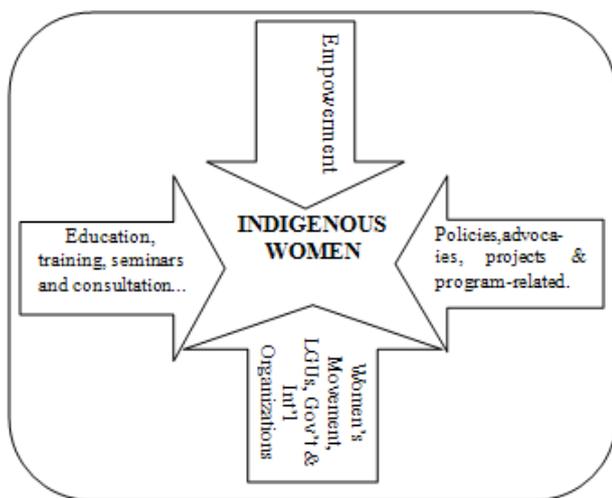


Figure 2.

The figure explains the continuous empowerment of women in the struggle to combat injustices by campaigning their concern advocacies and consciousness-raising and also providing education like the community-based initiatives on gender sensitivity training on culture, the role of indigenous women or peasant women in the political and social representation in the community as the women's movement, the government, local government units as well as international organizations must participate or collaborate to attain solving issues. There should be an effort to raise gender-consciousness and skills and responsibility must take

by the government for the group to be self-supportive and this is to help alleviating the situations by giving support and assistance to indigenous women and their families.

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