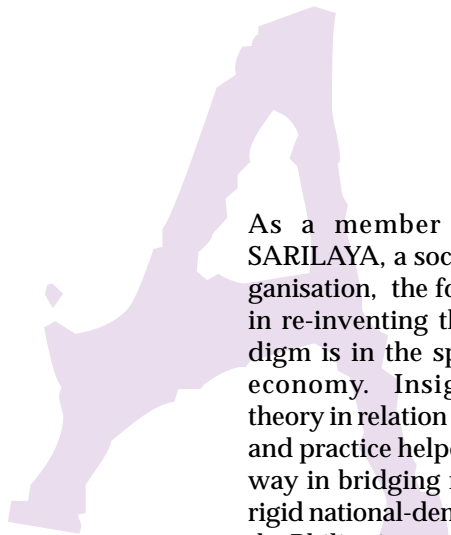


Reviews

Advocating Feminist Strategies in Economic Reforms

A review of *Gender Equity and Economic Reforms: Engendering Policy Critique and Advocacy of Philippine NGOs* by Patricia Fe C. Gonzales



As a member and leader of SARILAYA, a socialist-feminist organisation, the focus of my study in re-inventing the socialist paradigm is in the sphere of political economy. Insights of feminist theory in relation to socialist theory and practice helped me in no small way in bridging my dilemma as a rigid national-democratic activist in the Philippines who was in need of renewal. SARILAYA however, is far from the social/political organisation I joined in my young years. Then, the marching orders came from a seemingly united centre, and it did not matter at all whether one belonged to this or that organisation. What was important was to be attuned and in line with the marching orders.

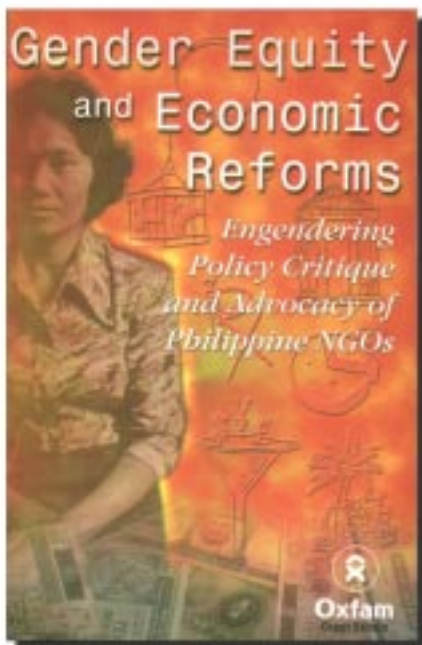
In the new environment of activism today however, not everything is cut and dried or black or white. Activists now find themselves groping for new “handles” with which to view present-day realities or present-day exploitations. Not that exploitation per se has already been eradicated. It is just that a new prism must now be used to analyse realities and accordingly, new paths or strategies need to be found.

Feminist economics is one new prism with which to view society and social change. The contribution

of feminism to economics is not so much to refocus the discourse, but rather to expand the focus of the discourse, to include what had been previously invisible and marginalised.

The book *Gender Equity and Economic Reforms* is an effort to put together a set of articles which can guide feminists, male or female, in feminist economic and social inquiry. For me, the book succeeds in guiding myself in putting together the bits and pieces of my own practice, personal reflections and theorising and relating these to the task of developing a coherent course of action at this present stage of our development as a people and as a movement. It also bridges the gap between the ideological exposition of capitalist patriarchy, and the concrete policy analyses and practical frameworks necessary for charting a feminist way of social change

The book actually starts with a brief survey of the level and extent of economic inquiry, theorising and practical action that have been reached by women’s organisations and institutions. Through this survey, DAWN and OXFAM Great Britain established the need for engaging in the discourse and coming up with this rich publication and sharing in the effort to evolve feminist methods in economic theory



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and practice. The survey report was written by Josefa Francisco, a prominent feminist in the Philippines. Feminist groups or women's organisations had focused mainly on political critique, she contends, but had very limited "handles" with which to address concrete policy advocacy in this field. Francisco calls it a "generalist critique of economics development."

While feminist advocacy had successfully established general recognition among academics and mixed NGOs of women's bodily, personal and sexual rights, an aspect that remains largely unexplored, as revealed by the survey, is the question of how women's personal empowerment and integrity could be advanced within an alternative, gender-fair and critical economic analysis. I dare add the point that feminist economics adds an essential component to the alternative paradigm that qualitatively changes the character of the alternative paradigm itself. A gendered analysis of mainstream economics and the resultant mainstream economic policies emanating from such frameworks cannot help but affect, not only the differential gender impacts of such policies and framework, but the overall concept or alternative paradigm itself which should stand as an alternative to mainstream economics.

In the first part of the book, three feminists report on their concrete experiences and efforts to formulate and implement policy advocacy. Maureen Pagaduan and Lorna Israel relate the experiences of a women's network in advocating for women, aid and development. Both authors point out the need to come up with sharper advocacy strategies by fully developing the analysis of women's micro-economic realities in relation to macroeconomic poverty programmes and development. In another article Sylvia Estrada-

Claudio pushes the boundaries of policy advocacy by insisting that reforming the Philippine health system necessarily means structural reform of both the health-care system and the state.

The second part of the book discusses "gender concepts and tools in economic inquiry." Academicians Jenina Chavez-Malaluan, Jean Frances Illo, Marina Fe Durano and Joselito San Jose provide the "handles" we are seeking, by discussing specific policy areas like women in agriculture, public finance, and women and trade. Lastly, Thalia Kidder discusses some possibilities presented by feminist microfinance, in the Latin American context.

One should not expect to find in this book a cohesive theoretical view on the alternative paradigm, policy and strategies vis-a-vis a feminist direction to social change. But it did give me a feeling that I have companions in this long journey for change, coworkers in the effort to evolve tools, analyses, theories, strategies, approaches, and yes, even to imagine long-term dreams and changed paradigms. While one or the other author might use different terms and view concepts or perspectives from a different angle, the reader can sense the basic unities evolving among feminists on the essential things that we want to put forward and contribute to mainstream thinking. Individual and collective articulation of these ideas will surely help us achieve stronger unity and perseverance in the struggle. ♡

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