

## Transforming Filipino Men through Innovative Projects

*The Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD, 1995-2025) is a model plan for other governments in Asia and the Pacific aiming for good governance through mainstreaming gender. This is not surprising as the PPGD is known for having gone through a highly participatory and consultative process involving several government agencies and NGOs operating at regional, national and community levels.*

*The PPGD is the single national gender and development (GAD) blueprint that is in force until the end of the first quarter of the century.*

*Beyond the laws and government policies influenced by the PPGD are initiatives and efforts at the local level in reaching out and in taking up gender and development issues of both men and women. The NGO sector is not wanting to be left behind in this effort. Some of them actually took on innovative programmes and projects targeting men in ensuring gender equality.*

*Three such projects are presented here. First is a new project by Kauswagan Community Social Center based in Southern Philippines which involves men in the fight against violence against women (VAW). Second is by the Manila-based Population Services Pilipinas Incorporated (PSPI) which is working with grassroots men in promoting reproductive health and rights. And third is Arugaan's counselling and documentation efforts in sharing with men the responsibility in breastfeeding children.*

### Breaking Down the Old Macho Image: Recreating Men **By Bruce N. Ragas**

**I**n southern Philippines, Kauswagan has been taking the lead as advocate on gender, sexuality and reproductive health issues, and particularly against Gender-Based Violence or Violence Against Women (VAW). Kauswagan Community Social Center is the community extension services of the Cebu Doctors' College. It is a community-based health and social centre in Cebu, a province in southern Philippines. Kauswagan is committed

to improving the quality of life of marginalised rural populations by providing affordable social and health services in a non-discriminatory, gender-sensitive and innovative manner. It provides training to rural health units, academic and medical institutions, and local government units to build their capacity in addressing reproductive health concerns, most especially focused on VAW.

The centre's director, Dr. Melanio Y. Sanchez, Jr., M.D., M.P.H. noticed, however, that from the start Kauswagan's work seemed to have been an exclusive concern of women. After a time he began to ask himself, "Where are the men in this serious discussion? Are they really the source of all these problems that have to do with gender, with sexuality and reproductive health? What if they are also victims, forced just like the women to behave in certain ways?"



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His first insight was that men tend to be violent mainly because that is the way society requires men to behave. This is how they are expected to enforce the idea that men are superior and women are inferior.

"Masculinity is not in our genes, it is in our imagination." That is how Michael Kaufman, organ-

iser of the famous men's group called White Ribbon Campaign, put it in his book *Cracking the Armour*. Society tells our boys: "To be a man you have to wear the armour of being tough, aggressive, uncompromising, strong, assertive, unyielding, rough, etc. Outside of that armour your masculinity would be questioned." A man who doesn't display these traits is despised and ostracised.

Therefore, women's liberation from gender oppression and exploitation must involve as well the liberation of men, imprisoned as they are in their own gender role. Both women and men have to free themselves, so that the benefits of their struggles may be mutually enjoyed and enhanced.

Dr. Sanchez started to introduce this idea at conferences, meetings and discussions on the issue of violence against women.

It is not enough to simply punish the perpetrators of violence against women, he argued. "Putting them behind bars will not prevent the same thing from happening again." The offender may have believed

that his actions were merely "part of being a man."

Don't you think, Dr. Sanchez asked, that these men also need help to change the way they look at themselves, the way they look at women, at society and their role in the world in general? "We have to make a better world where everyone, women and men alike, would regard each other as equal partners." Thus, he advocated counselling for offenders and orientation seminars that would reach out to men, let them see the issue as a whole, and solicit their suggestions on how to bring about the desired changes.

At first, his views were not too well received. Doubts and questions were raised, essentially asking why men had to be involved when they themselves are the perpetrators of violence.

In 1997, however, Dr. Sanchez decided to call a consultative meeting of men to discuss what they could do to help diminish the problem of violence against women. He invited well-known lawyers, academics, police and military officials, mass media practitioners, physicians and

religious, among others. The response was very positive. Despite the difficulty of finding a common time, a series of initial meetings was held and plans were made.

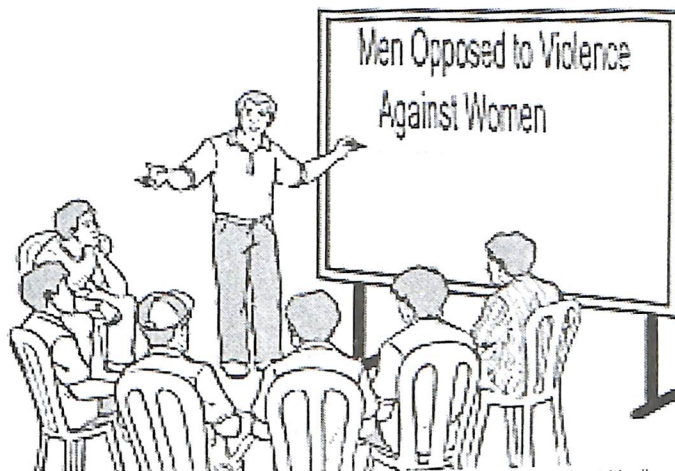
For a start, the group conducted an orientation seminar amongst its members on the issue of violence against women. We noted that most of those who attended had almost negligible knowledge of the issue. This has definitely changed after they attended the seminar moroso, after the media began to write articles on VAW and discussed it over the radio.

Though the group has not yet formally and legally organised, its viability has been demonstrated. Members get in touch with each other even in connection with issues other than reproductive health. Since Kauswagan has not yet accessed any funds to support the initiative, for the present it can only play a limited role. In the future, though, we are looking forward to the formal establishment of a group who will call themselves Men Opposed to Violence Against Women (MOVAW).

Kauswagan recently received a grant from the Southeast Asian Gender Equity Programme (SEAGEP) to conduct a Southeast Asian Conference on Men's Role in Violence Against Women. We hope to be able to announce the conference details as soon as we have finalised these so that all interested individuals and organisations may participate.

The major aim of the conference is to support the emerging movement of community groups involving men in advocacy and campaigns on violence against women. The conference would explore and document current initiatives in this area and suggest strategies for greater engagement and partnership between men and women to address and/or eliminate violence against women. The participants are expected to commit to guidelines or a framework of actions that they can pursue, and which would be helpful for the formation of new men's groups.

Furthermore, through this conference it is hoped that men's involvement in



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the cause of eliminating violence would increase and that their presence through organisations or associations would be felt not just in the Philippines but in the whole Southeast Asian region as well. We hope that in the near future we will see more and more men involving themselves in fighting violence against women. ☺

*Bruce N. Ragas works as a research assistant/documentor for Kauswagan Community Social Center. Kauswagan has several projects and programmes including a collaboration with the Reproductive Health project that was supported by the Ford Foundation. Kauswagan, with the assistance of MOVAW, organised the recently concluded "Southeast Asia Regional Workshop: Men and Gender Violence" that took place on 16-20 April 2001 in Lapu-Lapu City, the southern part of the Philippines.*