

Quest for Governance in the Philippines: Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examines the governance journey of a female mayor, focusing on her efforts to promote women's empowerment and gender equality within her leadership role. The study aims to describe her experiences, the opportunities and challenges she encountered, and the initiatives she implemented to support women in her community. Data collection involved in-depth interviews and participant observations, offering a comprehensive view of the mayor's political career and leadership style. The study reveals that the mayor's professional background, educational experiences, and personal qualities—such as her passion, commitment, and sense of excellence shaped her approach to governance. These attributes, coupled with her strong sense of public service, enabled her to introduce and execute programs that increased women's participation in socio-political and economic spheres, thus elevating their status within the community. This case study serves as an inspiring example, challenging the prevailing notion that gender should limit women's involvement in politics and public service. The findings underscore the importance of supportive frameworks that enable women's leadership and empowerment. Hence, the paper recommends the expansion of government initiatives and programs focused on enhancing women's political and leadership roles, as a means to further promote gender equality and contribute to national development.

Keywords: Case study, gender equality, governance, women empowerment

INTRODUCTION

In earlier times, women were political and spiritual leaders and respectable icons, as well as symbols of fertility and prosperity. However, as time goes by, the female dominated culture of earlier times switched from a matriarchal setting to a patriarchal setting (Yadav and Kumar, 2021). Thus, women were exploited and neglected through every possible means by the society. Women suffered a lot of criticisms, lacked of freedom like right of suffrage and stood nowhere next to men. Women were even deprived of the basic birthrights of a human being. Further, women were deprived of decision making power and access to education & employment and scapegoat of domestic violence.

Women continue to face legal discrimination, discriminatory social norms and practices that limit their access to institutions, property, employment, and inhibit their participation in the public sphere (OECD, 2014). This global concern has steadily grown through the past few decades and has resulted in efforts to bring women into the mainstream of life aimed at empowering them and thus restoring equality between the sexes. They have struggled hard over the last few decades but still been able to successfully establish their own identity.

From the presumed strictly household activities to being able to figure among the most powerful and influential personalities, the status of women has greatly evolved through the ages. Nowadays, women are adorned with patience and perseverance, which has helped them to attain the pinnacle of success. Along with handling tough clients at office, they successfully multitask at home too. Women are more focused and have a unique decision making power even at senior leadership level, and at times are in a better position than men (Zenger and Folkman, 2019). Empowering women can help the society to grow and develop at a faster pace.

Over the past decades, the empowerment of women has become a key aspect of development (Volker, 2022).

The term “women’s empowerment” originally appeared in the feminist discourse in the 1980s and since then has become widely adopted in the policy vocabulary of development organizations (Calvès 2009). According to a popular definition, “empowerment is the process by which women take control over their lives, acquiring the ability to make strategic choices” (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2002). Another definition by Kate Young 1993 as cited in Mahbub, 2021, empowerment enables women to take control of their own lives, set their own agenda, organize to help each other and make demands on the state for support and on the society itself for change.

At the basic level, these definitions of empowerment simply mean, the person’s fundamental ability to have power or control of their own lives concerning the fundamental rights and freedom that every person should be entitled to. So, in a broad sense, women empowerment would mean helping empower women to be independent and have more control over their own lives. It is a process of awareness, of capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision-making power and control leading to transformative action.

To this end, active involvement of women in decision-making positions will help foster the overall quality of governance in terms of boosting accountability and transparency, reducing corruption, and protecting the interest of marginalized sections of society (OECD, 2008); without women, achieving development is impossible (Morito and Zaelke, n.d.).

Today the country is placed as the seventh of 145 countries in terms of gender equality, according to the recent World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2016. The statistics show high quantity of jobs that Filipino women have in politics and management (Strother 2013).

In addition, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, based on information provided by national parliaments by 1st February 2016, they have 290 seats in the House of Representatives with 79 women, which represent 27.2%. And in the Senate, the Philippines have 24 seats with 6 women, which constitute 25%. The Philippines has had two female presidents, Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Both presidents contributed to advance women's situation in the country. (Philippines presidents 2006)

Moreover, in the judicial department, the former chief justice is a woman and female judges in the higher and lower courts are observable. In fact, incumbent women judges in Philippine courts on 2001 are about 21.4 percent (Hega, 2003). In the Local Government Unit, female Local Chief Executives are noticeable. Currently, the governor elect in the Province of Cebu is a woman. In 2001, 19.5 percent are female Governors, 13 percent Vice Governors, 16.5 percent Board Members, 15.6 percent Mayors, 12.4 percent Vice Mayors and 17.4 percent Councilors in the entire country (Hega, 2003). On the other hand, in the private sector, women are engaged in business; some are managers and even Chief Executive Officer. Women are also active in the academe; some are college deans, professors and administrators.

As to legal basis, the 1987 Constitution stipulates two prominent provisions relative to the protection of women. The first in the Declaration of Principles, Article II Section 14, asserts that "The State recognizes the role of women in nation-building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men." The second is Article XIII, Section 14 provides that "The state shall protect working women by providing safe and healthful working conditions taking into account their maternal functions, and such facilities and opportunities that will enhance their welfare and enable them to realize their full potential in the service of the nation". In addition, Republic Act 7192, otherwise known as “Women in Development and Nation Building Act”, an act promoting the integration of women as full and equal partners of men in development and nation building. It recognizes the role of women in nation building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men. Similarly, Republic Act 9710 also known as “Magna Carta for Women” affirms the role of women in nation building and ensures the substantive equality of women and men.

Significantly, these three legal bases seek to eliminate discrimination against women by recognizing, protecting, fulfilling and promoting the rights of Filipino women, especially those in marginalized sector. These laws direct all government agencies to institute measures that would eliminate gender bias in government policies, programs and project, to ensure that women are given the means to participate fully in development and nation building.

These also help increase the participation of women in the government, either national or local.

However, according to Abbas et al, 2021, despite the widespread acclamation of women empowerment and the major role of women in the development process, their status is not equal to that of men across most countries of the world. For instance, globally, women spend two to ten times more hours than men on unpaid care work. Similarly, of all the illiterate and poor people across the world, women constitute 65 and 70% respectively. It is reported that only 1% of the world's total assets are held in women's names. Moreover, data also indicates that 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in extreme poverty are women (Ferrant et al, 2014).

In addition, in public governance there are two phenomena that lead women in politics and governance in the Philippines. First is the push factor or their blood relationship to male politician e.g. political dynasty. Second is the phenomenon called women benchwarmers. Due to term limits, wives and daughters have taken over the positions left by the husbands or fathers for one term and then the man makes a comeback (Hega, 2003.) As such, there is still a need to highlight and recognize gender equality and women empowerment to the widest audience as possible most especially to the rural and mountainous areas (Anonuevo, 2000 as cited in Sumadsad and Tuazon, 2016).

Thus, this research aims to gaze and describe journey of Lady Mayor in public governance. Moreover, this study would like to discern the opportunities and challenges encountered in governance. Furthermore, the researcher would like to know the programs and projects implemented by the Lady Mayor in relation to women empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This is a qualitative case-study research design, which gazes into the life of a sole individual informant. A case study can either be a single or a multiple case (Yin, Merriam and Stake, 2015). The researcher employs a single-case where the focus is a detailed description of the case, the individual key informant. The term "single-case study" includes only one participant (Lobo, 2017). In methodological terms, given that the case study has often been seen as more of an interpretivist and idiographic tool, it has also been associated with a distinctly qualitative approach (Bryman, 2009).

Respondents

This study presented the case of a Lady Mayor in her representation and participation in politics and targets to provide a gist of how women participated and brought up empowerment in politics, especially in the modern times in the means of studying and delving her journey in politics.

Instrumentation and Data Gathering

An interview guide was formulated by the researcher. The said interview guide was scrutinized and approved by the Research Professor. This guide was utilized throughout the formal interview with the individual key informant of this study. Moreover, a cellular phone was used in recording all the verbatim. The recorded conversations were then transcribed from Visayan dialect to English for further analysis. Aside from interviews, observations were also conducted by the researcher. The individual key informant's facial expressions, gestures, manner of talking and other observable mannerisms were also recorded. All of these data were gathered which came out naturally. Documents in the form of newspaper clippings, videos and other materials on file were also scrutinized as additional data of the study.

Prior to data gathering, an informed consent in the form of a formal letter signed by the Research Professor was given to the Lady Mayor's Secretary. Such letter allowed the researcher to have their site entry where interview schedules were furnished. Other pertinent documents were also requested from the office for an easier access to all data needed in the study. After a couple of weeks, the researcher received a call from the Secretary of the Mayor's Office. This call was a signal to start collecting data. A convenient schedule to document everything

was provided for a smooth data collection.

Data Processing and Analysis

Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique. This approach is used to interpret meaning from the content of text data and, hence, adhere to the naturalistic paradigm (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

Triangulation was also used as another method for data analysis. Interviews, observations and documents were validated to countercheck the consistency and reliability of data.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in the study. The key informant in the study is unknown to the researcher; hence, no moral ascendancy may be imposed by the researcher towards them. The study is also conducted through the personal capacity of the researcher and no funding agencies or sponsorships shall be affected negatively in the conduct of the study.

Privacy and Confidentiality

In the study, the collected data will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Further, the name of the key informant will not be disclosed. Transcriptions shall be encoded in the computer with encryption so as to limit the access of such to the researcher alone. Such transcription, computer encoded and the written formats shall be deleted 6 months after the completion of the study.

Informed Consent Process

Respect for persons, who may solicit consent, how and when it will be done who may give consent especially in case of special minors and those who are not legally competent to give consent, or indigenous people which require additional clearances will be observed in the study. Right of withdrawal of participation shall also be respected in the conduct of the study. In case the key informant chooses to withdraw in the course of the interview, the researcher shall respect the decision without prejudice to the key informant. The key informant, however, may not be able to withdraw his/her responses as soon as the paper has been published.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Journey in Governance

The Lady Mayor joined politics in 2016 as Local Chief Executive as the first Lady Mayor of the city in Southern part of Cebu. Admittedly, the Lady Mayor was influenced by her family especially her father. She grows up seeing her father as a public servant. Her father was a Barangay Captain then Counselor, Vice Mayor then a Local Chief Executive. As the Lady Mayor uttered:

“The former mayor is my father. Basically, its name recall, the performance of my father and his relationship to the constituents. Lastly, the credentials being a lawyer.

Benefits and Opportunities

According to the Lady Mayor, the benefit as a Local Chief Executive is to have an influence, power, authority and to make an impact and direction in terms of development in the city. In addition, opportunities in terms of professional growth like trainings and deep dive activities local, national and international to learn their best practices. Opportunities to meet people who make difference in national and international level. Lastly, being elected as Local Chief executive as a woman is a big opportunity. The Lady Mayor even said:

“Kay if we try to look at it, pila raman kabuuk sa Cebu Province ang babaye nga mayor!” (If we try to look at it, how many women as Local Chief Executive in the Cebu Province?)

Challenges

The Lady Mayor encountered different challenges in governance. Admittedly, she seeks the support of the department heads and personnel. Accordingly, most of the department heads are older than the Lady Mayor and they are in the government in general with diverse leadership and management style. As the Lady Mayor uttered:

“They are set in their own ways so, it’s always a challenge to give them another perspective on how you do public service and public governance to improve and overhaul the system of the city government. Dile pasabut na mao na inyu na andan mao ranay paagi nga maayo, there is room for improvement, you can learn bisan dugay namo sa pang gobyerno.” (It does not mean that if you are used to that style and habit that is correct, there is a room for improvement and you can learn even if you are working in the government for a long time.)

The Lady Mayor strives for a heart to heart talk and always challenged the department heads and personnel for the improvement of the city government. In addition, being a woman at her young age in politics is also a challenge. As the Lady Mayor said:

“kay babaye sad ko, I felt that mas kinahanglan nako i- stress ang kind of my leadership, kay bata bata pako compare sa former mayor, babaye pa gyud.” (Because I am a woman, and I need to stress my kind of leadership most especially I am younger compare to the former mayor.)

Finally, the landslide tragedy that shocked the entire city and Province of Cebu which happened during her administration was a huge challenge by the mayor not just as a Local Chief Executive but also as a woman at her young age. As the Lady Mayor uttered:

“When the landslide happened, it was a test not just a person but also as a woman, if this woman can handle it, if this woman can manage the crisis.”

Although, the Lady Mayor was confident enough in her capacity and knows she has the heart to deliver the deliverables and do public service. She addressed these challenges by making the department heads accountable. She makes sure that the department heads will submit accomplishment reports, be an output oriented and not just for compliance. Moreover, on the landslide tragedy, the Lady Mayor makes sure that she was present since day one; she was transparent in all actions and decisions, and accountable. As the Lady Mayor uttered:

“Mao ni ang atung pagkaun sa evacuation center, mao ni ang atung financial assistance.” (This is our food and our financial assistance.)

Most of all, the Lady Mayor acknowledged all the help from different walks of life in different sectors. As the interview continued, the Lady Mayor said:

“Ang pagtabang sa mga tawo, Kung walay nitabang namo we will not survive it.” (The help of the people, if they don’t help us we will not survive it.)

Above all, the Lady Mayor wants to learn from that experienced, the city government wants to learn of what happened. Hence, the city government taps the University of Philippines Resiliency Institute, to help in revising the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP).

It implies that, the journey of the Lady Mayor in governance is bitter sweet. She experienced different opportunities like trainings; and challenges not just a person being in charge to handle the situation but also as a woman. Nevertheless, the Lady Mayor is confident enough and people oriented hence, she acknowledged the people in helping most especially to the most difficult time in her administration.

Programs and Projects as Woman

The Lady Mayor launched a 10-Point Development Plan which includes institutional development that will empower the citizens through information, institutionalize Purok system and enhance human resources. It also includes social services, healthy citizenry installing one stop shop and health facility accessible to all. This

development plan emphasizes quality education in which the city expanded the scholarship program, increased subsidy, increased the stipend and nurturing the city government through department of education strong partnership. In addition, it includes infrastructure development that will construct reclamation projects and city boardwalk. Moreover, tourism and heritage development, green environment and agriculture support, peace, order and safety are part of this development plan. Further, it also promotes economic dynamism with the vision to create economic zones and IT hubs within the city. Finally, resiliency in terms of disaster wherein the city government provides financial humanitarian assistance, implement the hazard reduction plan, revisit policy directions and formulating the master plan for mining and the revision of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP).

The Lady Mayor implemented this development plan because she felt that the city has to improve its human resource, the systems and processes in order to deliver and provide quality service. As the Lady Mayor said:

“Institutional development, because you cannot give what you don’t have.”

In addition, the Lady Mayor is a believer on quality education. As the Lady Mayor uttered:

“I believe that, education is an “equalizer. It’s an only hope to break poverty.”

Further, the Lady Mayor organized the ANAK NAGA were the city government targeted mothers within the city to propose a livelihood project and the city government will provide a financial capital to start up the said project. The Local Chief Executive implemented this project because she believes that most of the mothers, sacrifices everything for the entire family. As the Lady Mayor uttered:

“Because the mothers are the one’s rearing their children. Kasagaran gyud ang mga Mama mao gyud mga matuto sa mga bata so sila gyud ang dako ug influence, sila ang nag ensure nga nag eskwela ilang mg anak.” (Mostly, the mothers are the one’s nurturing their children, they have an influence to ensure that their children will go to school.)

To make these programs successful, the Lady Mayor believes that participatory governance and community engagement like the Purok system is a key. As the Lady Mayor said:

“The only way to make the program successful is to make sure that the people knows, believes the program and helps you implementing it. People participation, community engagement, participatory governance is the key to a successful of the implementation of any program. To make sure that they voluntarily commit the program, to make sure that they have an ownership of the program to make it sustainable.”

This signifies that, the Lady Mayor in the implementation of the projects and programs is a believer of collaborative governance, participatory governance through engaging the people. It has been said that, the people is the end consumer hence, the people must know, understand and own the project to make it successful and sustainable. Hence, participatory governance will lead to responsiveness, transparency, efficiency and public service (Speer, 2012).

Women Empowerment/ Gender equality Support

The Lady Mayor candidly admits that being a woman in the local government is powerful and influential. Consequently, she makes history in the city as the first Lady Mayor. Hence, she inspires the women in the city, in the province and in the entire nation to be a public servant. As the interview continued:

“As a Lady Mayor, I was a symbol of a woman who is empowered, who has a voice and a woman who was able to substantiate her ideas into actions for the good of the community.” “As a woman, I inspired the girls nga pwede pud sila mahimong Mayor.” (As a woman, I inspired the women that there is a possibility to be a Local Chief Executive.)

In addition, the Lady Mayor believes that women empowerment is a parameter to gender equality. The Local Chief Executive thinks that women should be represented in all sectors like in businesses, corporations and

governance. As the Lady Mayor uttered:

“I would like to believe that when we empower women it’s one of the ways of ensuring that we have gender equality.”

Moreover, the Lady Mayor challenged the women in the country most especially in her own city. The Local Chief Executive believes that there is always a room for women in governance and public service. The Lady Mayor even said:

“You can always try. Do not be intimidated; do not think that politics and government is only for men; we need women in government and in public service.”

Lastly, the Lady Mayor believes that everyone most especially women can contribute in different manner and in various ways. She emphasized that, as a Purok leader, as a teacher, as a policewoman, woman in public service elected or appointed can contribute for as long as you do your role excellently. As the Lady Mayor uttered:

“Any woman, in any role can contribute to nation building and community development if she does her work with commitment, passion and excellence.”

It implies that, the Lady Mayor is an advocate of women empowerment; that there is room for women in governance and in public service. Moreover, the Local Chief Executive believes that women can contribute and do more in nation building for as long as they work with commitment, passion and excellence. Empowerment is not something that can be done to or for women. Women are the agents of their empowerment. Hence, gender awareness and empowering women requires a culture of accountability, transparency and responsibility to gender equality (Harcourt, 2011). Furthermore, there is still a need to propagate gender equality and women empowerment to the widest audience as possible most especially to the rural and mountainous areas (Anonuevo, 2000 as cited in Sumadsad and Tuazon, 2016).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Lady Mayor quest for governance is an epitome of good governance and public service in the public office. She implemented a truthful programs and projects most especially on women and underprivileged sectors. Although, the Lady Mayor experienced ups and downs in her journey that taught her a lesson, the Lady Mayor stood up as an empowered woman that can surpass every challenge. Further, the journey of the Lady Mayor in governance is truly an inspiration to women who aspires to set foot in politics. Indeed, the Lady Mayor is an image maker not just in governance and public service but also to women and the rest of the constituents. Hence, ones gender does not dictate on who will contribute in nation building, it’s just a matter of commitment, passion, excellence and genuine service to the populace.

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