

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Women leaders' experiences in community organizing for housing rights: Contributions, tensions, and negotiations

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ABSTRACT

Background: Women are crucial leaders of the Alliance of People's Organizations Along Manggahan Floodway (APOAMF), a federation of people's organizations in Pasig City who have successfully implemented their People's Plan for in-city housing. As leaders of their federation, they are also leaders of their community's struggle.

Objective: This paper aims to outline the contributions of the women leaders of APOAMF to their successful People's Plan and to examine the ways in which their participation in this struggle affected their daily lives.

Methodology: The study followed a feminist methodology in its use of a focus group discussion with five APO-AMF women leaders and four APO-AMF women members. The questions were designed to elicit stories of women's participation and leadership during the overall community experience of organizing for their right to decent housing. In addition to the initial questions provided by the researcher, the women took control of the narrative even beyond the prepared questions, leading to a co-creation and re-presentation of their story. The research findings were theoretically discussed using the framework of women-centered community organizing.

Results: Over the course of their involvement in the struggle for housing, women experienced a personal journey towards becoming established community leaders. They became involved because they saw it as an opportunity for service, wanted to secure a decent home for their family, and understood the need for safe and secure housing. They contributed to the struggle through various acts of leading and organizing their community, engaging in dialogue internally and externally, and emotionally nurturing their community to persist in their struggle. These contributions also highlighted the difference between women and men in community leadership. On the other hand, this struggle also exacted a toll on the women leaders. The women noted that they sacrificed time at home, time with family, and time for one's self. In the tension between contribution and sacrifice, the women often resolved this by highlighting the reality that their struggle was for the good of the whole community, not just for themselves; that the whole organization would benefit, not just their family.

Conclusion: The provision of safe and decent housing must truly empower women in both the public and private spheres. Even as women are capable community leaders in the public sphere, they also retain duties in the private sphere—culminating in a double burden for these women leaders. Community organizing then, aside from raising the consciousness of the people regarding the issue, must also include raising awareness on gender roles and dynamics.

Keywords: *women, community organizing, APOAMF, people's plan, housing*

Introduction

Women are crucial leaders of the Alliance of People's Organizations Along Manggahan Floodway (APOAMF), a federation of people's organizations in Pasig City who have successfully implemented their People's Plan for in-city housing. The community accomplished this through the People's Plan, defined by Republic Act 11201 as “the plan

formulated by the beneficiary-association which shall contain a site development plan that conforms to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan of the local government unit under whose jurisdiction the project site is proposed to be located...” [1]. More than just a plan, however, the People's Plan is also an approach utilized by people's organizations to realize their

right to safe and decent housing. It is a community-driven process that is grounded in the intellectual leadership and agency of the people and involves multiple stakeholders [2], where the affected Informal Settler Families (ISF) participate in the entire process; from identification and analysis to planning, implementation, and monitoring [3]. Thus, community organizing is crucial to the People's Plan process [3].

In Metro Manila, Philippines, urban poor women have always been involved in community organizing for housing rights. Urban poor women often bore the brunt of the lack of safe and decent housing, as their experiences of eviction and displacement were often different from men. In distant areas of relocation, women were often left at home while men returned to look for jobs in the city. This separation often led to family disintegration [4].

Given these different experiences, women thus often took on leadership roles in their communities in order to organize for safe and decent housing. One example is the women-led Samahang Apektadong Pamilya sa Riles (SAPAR), a people's organization that mobilized against eviction and displacement due to railway projects. Women community leaders also engage in formal government institutions such as local barangay politics and livelihood programs. In a certain network coalition of 39 people's organizations, women held 75% of leadership positions. This coalition was also involved in local politics: in local decision-making bodies, 80% were women representatives and took part in local budgeting and planning for government bottom-up budgeting [4]. However, these positions (and the subsequent work they require) do not easily lend themselves to the configurations of these women's lives. In the community of Sitio San Roque, women who organized for housing often had to negotiate the configurations of care work in order for them to carve out time to contribute to their community's struggle. These reconfigurations involved external negotiations with family members and emotional internal negotiations of the women's own expectations of their responsibilities as wives and mothers [8].

In post-resettlement contexts, women continued to hold multiple roles: wife, mother, and community leader. Women acted as "bridges" that sought to obtain basic services for the community and "brokers" that wielded power and influence in the community. According to one study, "women leaders in the Philippine community have better interpersonal skills, are more empowered and active in civic organizations and activities, bring more projects and activities to their members, and connect better to the authorities" [5]. However, despite

the dominance of women leaders in communities, gender equality remains to be seen in terms of leadership, decision-making, and access to suitable programs, projects, and authorities. For instance, the men in the community could complain that women-initiated projects were mostly created for women. Gender dynamics of each community still have to be understood in order to engage influential actors and create the right interventions [5].

Abstracting these experiences of urban poor women in community organizing leads us to the theoretical discussion of gender dynamics, particularly in terms of women and political organizing. Originally, political organizing proceeded along very gendered lines: women looked after the family and community, while men proceeded to take charge in asserting rights in public arenas [6]. However, this split has become blurred with women's participation in activist endeavors. Women working in these spaces are located in a liminal space, going back and forth between their public and private work, and transcending the divide between their family/community and the public arenas wherein the assertion of rights occurs [10,11]. In this evolving space, the community is likewise reshaped as the public and private are integrated through women's organizing strategies which are often drawn from their experiences, actions, and identities in the private sphere [12,13].

Thus, cognizant of this clear yet permeable and evolving boundary between women's public political work and private care work, this paper had the following objectives: first, to outline the contributions of the women leaders of APOAMF to their successful People's Plan and realization of their right to decent housing; second, to examine the ways in which their participation in this struggle affected their daily lives including the tensions and negotiations that they managed in order to realize their contributions. In the process of asserting their rights to obtain the housing that they did not have, the women also had to give up so much. The study covered the events and experiences of the APOAMF women leaders from the early 2000s up to 2018. Viewing the organization's struggle for decent housing through this gender lens highlights gendered community dynamics and the significant experiences of women as leaders and members of the organization.

Methodology

The research was conducted in the Manggahan Residences community of the Alliance of People's Organizations Along Manggahan Floodway (APOAMF). Entry to the community was coordinated through the organizers from Community

Organizers (CO) Multiversity. One large focus group discussion was conducted with five APO-AMF women leaders and four APO-AMF women members. Participants were selected for the FGD through the assistance of the organizers from CO Multiversity, based on their position within the Alliance and/or active participation in the activities of APOAMF. The women leaders held significant positions in the Alliance as former or present heads of their respective organizations, officials in the overall Alliance, or building representatives.

The following were some of the main questions asked during the FGD. Employing the gender lens, these general questions were designed to elicit stories of women's participation and leadership during the overall community experience of organizing for their right to decent housing. Specifically, through highlighting the experiences of women leaders and members, these questions were created to complement an overall timeline of the APOAMF experience, which was co-produced with the community, APOAMF, and fellow researchers.

Magpakilala po muna tayo, at kung paano po kayo naging involved dito sa Manggahan o sa APO-AMF?

Ano po 'yung mga karanasan niyo bilang kababaihan na tumatak talaga sa inyo?

Ano po 'yung naging proseso ng empowerment?

Ano po 'yung mga ginawa ng kababaihan? Specific examples?

Other follow-up questions were asked over the course of the discussion in order to encourage the introduction of other relevant narratives or anecdotes. Over the course of the FGD, feminist methodology was also followed in the application of the gender lens; that is, allowing the women to take control of the narrative even beyond the prepared questions to co-create and re-present their story [9]. This was particularly useful in surfacing not just the women's contributions but also the tensions and negotiations that were threaded throughout these achievements. In this way, the women shaped not just the narrative of the data but also the objectives of the study. Thus, the gender lens was employed not just theoretically in the analysis, but also in praxis through the feminist process of data collection. The discussion was transcribed and narrative analysis was employed after the fieldwork in order to identify certain specific themes that arose directly from the women's stories. In this way, data analysis followed the feminist methodology and gender lens.

The research findings were theoretically discussed using the framework of women-centered community organizing [6]. This particular framework expounded on by Stall &

Stoecker (1998) was formulated as a critique of the Alinsky model of community organizing, which they describe as being inadequate in its inclusion of gender-based dynamics [6]. The model of community organizing used by COM in their organizing of APOAMF is based on the Alinsky principles of community organizing [7]. However, in practice, communities often engage in hybrid forms of both the Alinsky and women-centered models [6], as proven in succeeding sections through the case of APOAMF. The use of a gender lens through the framework of women-centered community organizing made it possible to focus on women's narratives within this hybrid form.

Results and Discussion

How did they get involved? The journey of becoming a leader

Stall & Stoecker (1998) highlight that in women-centered community organizing, leadership development nurtures women who are linked and rooted in local networks, with the belief that all have the capacity to be leaders in the community. Thus, these women of APOAMF did not immediately begin as leaders in the community. Before formally joining meetings for the organization, many of them were mothers who were focused on raising their children or were working women holding jobs or managing small businesses.

In 2009, in the wake of Typhoon Ondoy, communities along Manggahan Floodway were ordered by the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) to vacate their homes or face demolition. This drove many women to join meetings of their local organizations (samahan) and participate in these meetings in small ways, like taking attendance.

One year later, the eleven (11) local organizations merged into the federation: the Alliance of People's Organizations Along Manggahan Floodway (APOAMF). It is perhaps in this respect that the case of women leaders in APO-AMF does not fit Stall & Stoecker's (1998) "informal small groups." The community members created a long-lasting federation from eleven (11) smaller organizations and this enabled them to better achieve their goals for housing. In the context of APOAMF, the small informal groups and modest struggles of the women-centered community organizing model would have been less effective due to the urgency and scale of the issue being addressed.

From the local organizations to the APOAMF federation, most of the members and officers were (and are) women. Due to the fact that most of the men were at work, the women were the ones who could attend the meetings. Since they attended these meetings of their local organizations.,

they were the ones who understood the issues and they eventually became more involved.

The federation was assisted by the Community Organizing Multiversity (COM, a non-government organization) through consciousness-raising about the issue at hand. In this case, this involved raising the community's awareness of the right to decent housing and the details of the People's Plan approach. The women were able to get more involved due to the COM's lessons on how to assert their rights. Most of the mobilization, negotiation, and dialogue tactics that the women employed were learned from the COM. From learning the laws to establishing the federation, the COM guided the women to learn and lead. In turn, the women were very grateful for this guidance.

Their partnership with the COM started even before the APOAMF was established as a federation, but the essential memory that the women remembered was that the COM was the first to introduce them to Republic Act 7279 (the Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992) during the time when their communities were facing demolitions post-Ondoy. As the women learned of their rights to housing enshrined in law, this became their starting point to organizing their community towards decent housing. Their partnership with the COM was one of guidance. According to the women, the COM would provide the ideas but the decisions would be left to them.

After the earlier years of struggle, the women continued to lead and their partnership with the COM continued within the Manggahan community. Organizers from the COM also helped to mediate pertinent issues within the community. Their guidance role also continued, helping the women leaders to understand their struggle and the consequences of their actions in order to make decisions. The organization (with mostly women leaders and members) continued to assert its rights to housing under the guidance of the COM. This relationship showed that in APOAMF, both the women leaders and COM shared the role of being "bridge leaders" [6], as the leaders had their networks in the community but the COM organizers contributed the political knowledge.

Women who became more involved in the community organizing process with the COM eventually became high-ranking officials in their local organizations. This was a process of empowerment similar to that described by Stall and Stoecker (1998), as the women went through cycles of action and reflection (with assistance from COM) to help them learn more about their struggle and what they had to do to achieve their goals. This also translated to changes in

self-perception, from mother ("*ulirang nanay*") to excellent and competent organization leader ("*magaling ang opisyal na babae*"). However, while they were empowered in the public sphere, many of the women still retained their private sphere duties in their respective households.

Why did they get involved?

The women who chose to become involved in their local organizations cited many reasons for their involvement. First, those who occupied top leadership positions in the federation saw it as an opportunity to serve their community ("*pagkakataon para maglingkod*"), not for power or position, and without any expectation of a reward. Love for their fellow community members sustained the leaders' selfless service. While they did not serve for any material gain, the leaders also hoped that the members would appreciate what they were doing for the community.

In a dynamic of reciprocity, other women became involved as members of their local organizations because they observed and appreciated the commitment and sacrifices of the women leaders in higher positions, which manifested in the help that was extended to them as members. Later, some of these women who joined as members eventually became leaders themselves.

On their part, the leaders did acknowledge that they would not be able to accomplish anything without their members. The women leaders described it as the twin forces of belief ("*naniniwala*") and support through participation ("*sumusuporta sa ginagawa*"). Thus, the relationship between leaders and members is highly reciprocal, although not in material terms. While the women leaders serve without material compensation, the members do appreciate their service and reciprocate through supporting the leaders. This support, in turn, encourages the leaders to continue their work. This "practical reciprocity" [6] is also what constitutes justice in the women-centered model of community organizing, where relationships carry a moral responsibility.

Second, for some women of APOAMF, they initially joined the meetings because their husbands were unable to participate mostly due to jobs that had long hours or were located outside Metro Manila. Other women were single and thus were able to join on their own accord.

Lastly, out of all the reasons for participating, the essential reason for involvement that echoed throughout the discussion was that of the women protecting their home, asserting their right to safe and decent housing for their family

members (*"Sumanib na ako sa samahan kasi bahay na 'yung pinag-uusapan."*). Before moving to the low-rise buildings built through the People's Plan, many of these women were living with their families along Manggahan Floodway. The women of APOAMF knew that this area was unsafe, as they had already experienced the many dangers of their precarious position (e.g. flooding during Typhoon Ondoy). Thus, they resolved to lead the struggle in order to realize their right to decent and secure housing.

The Women's Contribution to the Struggle

Action

The women of APOAMF performed not just the physical actions of leadership (such as mobilization and negotiation), but they also took the lead in accomplishing the relational aspects of leadership that arguably formed the backbone of the organization's persistence in the struggle. In addition, many of the functions that women performed called for a mix of both the physical and relational aspects of leadership.

In terms of physical actions, the women were definitely active agents, especially during the most crucial moments. For example, during the Morales Pader demolition in June 2011, women were at the barricade as frontliners. This was part of their organization's response plan for demolitions. According to the APOAMF women, their rationale for this plan was their certainty that less conflict would erupt if women were at the front lines compared to men (who they saw as more prone to physical violence when emotionally affected).

For some of the women, physical leadership went as far as becoming physically painful. One woman leader sat down at the barricade and refused to move, even as water from the demolition team's fire truck targeted her at full force. The other women saw this act as risking one's life for the struggle and their respect for this leader grew as a result.

As front liners during demolitions, the women leaders also had to contend with the fact that they could not save everything. Often, this came down to them prioritizing their members before their own property. One woman leader had to watch the houses of other community members to make sure that the fire and demolition wouldn't reach them; but in the end, her own house was burned down and she was only able to save her family members: *"Binabantayan ko yung mga bahay, prinoprotektahan na hindi magiba, pero nung huli na, yung bahay ko ang hindi ko na kayang protektahan kasi sunog na."*

Physical contributions to the struggle were not limited to the leaders. The women leaders asserted that the actions of

members who participated in the organization were also part of leadership. Members joined all mobilizations (or as many as they could) in order to support their leaders' efforts (*"sumasama naman kami"*). Beyond mobilizations, the women of APOAMF also sought to participate in other ways like looking out for their neighbors during disasters and taking care of their family responsibilities.

From the leaders' viewpoint, these actions were also part of being leaders, even if these members did not hold any official positions in the organization. Members who brought up suggestions for the community were also tapped to lead the implementation of these suggested plans. This dynamic between women members and leaders is evidence of the "group-centered" leadership of women-centered development, where the goal is to involve as many community members as possible instead of creating competitive dynamics over a few elevated positions [6]. Evidently, because the leaders served without asking for material rewards, they were able to freely share the responsibilities and privileges of the position of leadership.

Alongside the physical actions of leadership, women also often accomplished more relational leadership tasks. To augment the mobilization efforts, the women of APOAMF were highly essential during dialogue and negotiation. During meetings with government agencies such as the National Housing Authority (2012) and individuals such as Congress representatives who were possible allies for the APOAMF's People's Plan (2013), the women leaders often became emotional and cried. Rather than viewing this as a weakness, it became evident to the women that their emotional presence during these meetings provided an imperative for the government officials to address their demands. In fact, their own emotion and persistence in dialogue reinforced the APOAMF women's belief that women were better able to clearly explain their demands as compared to the men leaders. It became an organizational strategy to have the women leaders present during tense times of dialogue.

Thus, more than the tears, the women leaders of APOAMF were confident in their ability (as women) to explain their demands to government bodies. Their place and status as women gave them a special emotional insight and understanding of housing for them to convey in these public spaces of negotiation and dialogue, especially as women leaders who were also speaking on behalf of their members (*"Talagang maipapaliwanag mo nang maayos sa kausap niyo, sa mga ahensya ng gobyerno, kung gaano siya kasakit"*). They had experienced and felt the hardship of eviction and demolition as

both mothers with families and women leaders; thus, they felt that these experiences enriched and further clarified their dialogue with government bodies.

Within the organization, women were also part of the planning stage for these negotiations and dialogues with government agencies. Relational skills were highly needed here because the organization needed to present a united front to the government agencies. Women leaders consolidated all the members' ideas into one organizational stand ("*idea ng bawat isa na pinag-iisa...iisang boses lang yung dala-dala namin.*") The women leaders were therefore a crucial part of organization meetings because they contributed ideas and facilitated discussion in order to achieve a certain consensus.

This role of women in building unity in the community is an example of what the women-centered community organizing model calls "co-active" power, which is power based on human interdependence and collaboration [6]. This can be seen in the women leaders' drive for their community to be united (*pagkakaisa*), especially in terms of organizational stances that are collaboratively constructed for negotiations with government agencies.

In 2010-2012, these meetings which women led and participated in also included the organizational planning for the APOAMF People's Plan itself. During those times, the organizations were mostly made up of women who were essential agents in the drafting of the Plan. These women who led the planning made sure to include their members in the entire process.

The hands-on nature of the APOAMF women's relational leadership is also seen in how they built relationships between leaders and members. Women leaders clearly took the initiative to connect with their members. One officer of the federation who started her leadership journey as a president in a local organization went house-to-house in order to check up on her members, especially during times of typhoons.

Thus, it is evident that both the physical and relational aspects of leadership are important in the struggle of APOAMF. In addition, some tasks of women leaders called for entwined competencies in both physical and relational aspects of leadership. There are two examples of such tasks: being part of the Beneficiaries' Selection Arbitration Award Committee (BSAAC) and estate management.

From May to December of 2014, the BSAAC was convened to identify beneficiaries of APOAMF's first finished buildings. Women from APOAMF asserted their right to be

part of the BSAAC because they were the beneficiaries of the project; and as leaders, they knew their members best. They submitted a list to the Committee of their verified member-beneficiaries based on their own records. The leaders also saw their position in the BSAAC as another way to forward the rights of their members. This is an example of a leadership task that is both physical and relational because it involves negotiation and dialogue in bringing the causes of their members to the public space.

Estate management is another arena where women could accomplish both physical and relational aspects of leadership. One example is the implementation and enforcement of curfew within the APOAMF compound. When the organization tried using men leaders to enforce the curfew through roving patrols, they found that men were too strict and rules-oriented, which resulted in an ineffective implementation. Women had a different approach. The women leaders described their approach to curfew rule enforcement as gentler and more effective, as the youth in the community would not react as negatively if women leaders were the ones enforcing the rule. While rules enforcement is the physical aspect of this task, the women employed their relational skills in order to effectively enforce the rule.

Emotion

Emotion was clearly crucial for the women leaders, as they used it even as a strategy during dialogue with government agencies. More than individual strategies, however, women's leadership in the APOAMF was also built by harnessing a spectrum of emotions that eventually lent the movement an emotive aspect.

Building and uniting the community was an emotional process. Their first point of unity was the threat of impending demolition. This was further reinforced through the formation of a federation of eleven (11) local organizations. Emotion – described by the women leaders as love shared by leaders and members working for the good of the community – animated this process of coming together and building solidarity towards a common goal that would benefit the whole community.

When the community became united under a single cause, the women faced the discouragement of critics who told them that they were fighting for a lost cause. Other residents along the Manggahan Floodway who were not members of APOAMF were immediately disbelieving the federation's efforts. The women of APOAMF resolved to shrug off these comments and focus on persevering in their

endeavors to achieve the People's Plan. These criticisms from outside the organization strengthened the resolve of the women leaders to listen to their members first, as they were the ones who believed in the leaders and the struggle.

The emotional narrative did not stop there. After the first phases of the Manggahan Residences were established in 2014 onwards, the women noted a change in outsiders' views of them and their organization. From harsh criticism and skepticism, the women eventually experienced admiration from those who were amazed at what they were able to achieve.

While strong persistence in the struggle, listening to those who "believed," and the joy of eventually achieving their goals formed part of the women's emotional response to criticism, there was also the narrative of pain. Aside from being leaders and active members in the organization and the struggle, these women were also mothers and wives. Due to their leadership responsibilities, they had to sacrifice time and responsibilities within the home; for some of them, as succeeding sections will show, these sacrifices were especially painful.

Having to make these sacrifices made hearing harsh comments harder and more emotionally agonizing. These comments often did not take into account the magnitude of the leaders' sacrifices to achieve the People's Plan for the community. For the women leaders, harsh criticisms were especially difficult to take because they had already sacrificed so much while working not just for themselves but for the broader community.

In the face of critics and difficulties in the struggle, women leaders did not just have to fortify themselves emotionally – they also had to encourage their members and the organization at large. This is the greatest emotional task of the women leaders: mothering the community at large, engaging in "activist mothering" [6] in order to achieve unity. More than encouragement, the women leaders also had to shepherd their organization through the political aspects of their struggle and ensure that the information and discussions were passed down from leaders to the members.

The women leaders also saw the recruitment of new members in the organization as a process of adoption ("*kumbaga hindi nila anak, [pero] ina-adopt nila lahat*"), further highlighting their perspective of seeing the members as their children and part of their family. These new members affirmed the role of the leaders in mothering the broader community and adopting them into the organization as members and beneficiaries.

In leadership roles, the APOAMF women saw themselves as the mothers of the community, with their role as mothers in the home (encouraging and teaching their children) extending to their members as well, viewing their members as though they were their children and family. They also used their abilities to explain and clarify not just for government officials, but also for members within the community. This is a manifestation of what Stall & Stoecker (1998) term the "ethic of care," a characteristic of women-centered organizing that differentiates it from the Alinsky model. In living out this ethic of care, the women leaders mothered the community, guided organizational actions through persistent explanations, and encouraged the community towards their goal.

The Effect of the Struggle on Women

Of all the aspects of the struggle that called for sacrifice, time was the chief culprit identified by the women – particularly the long meetings that kept them away from home for hours, sometimes overnight. These long meetings had ramifications for the responsibilities that these women held within the home. Some said that they had no more time for household chores and most emphasized that the time taken by meetings meant less time for family.

There were different aspects of sacrifice when it came to the women's relationships and responsibilities with their families. Other women leaders would be locked out of their house after coming home from a long meeting, where their family members would refuse to let them in. Some women said that their husbands complained of lack of time spent with them, while many others had to give up time with their children. The mothers narrated that when they were not yet involved with the housing struggle, they were able to spend more time with their children and assist them in doing their homework. When they became involved in the issues of housing and demolition, they were no longer at home to greet and help their children because they were at meetings. When they arrived home, their children were asleep. The home situations of women leaders with families were difficult to manage simultaneously with their commitments to the organization.

The women also mentioned their personal sacrifices: forgoing marriage, forgetting one's personal appearance, lacking the time to clean, do laundry, or just rest, and giving up employment or small businesses. However, the sacrifice of time with their families still weighed more: the women leaders emphasized that money from businesses could still be recovered but time with their families could no longer be taken back.

The women's justification for their sacrifices was that other people (the broader community) would be able to benefit from their work. This sentiment was also echoed in what they told their children when the children asked what their mothers were up to, and why they had to take time at long meetings.

Some children became involved in the community's struggle as well, partly as a result of their mothers passing on this view of the community. The children of the community became curious and discussed with their friends and family what their mothers were doing, their advocacy, and the issues of housing and demolition. Children also directly joined mobilizations in order to urge government agencies (such as the National Housing Authority) for faster completion of the APOAMF People's Plan project. Consequently, the women were grateful that their children sought to understand the work that they did for them.

Tensions and Negotiations

There were three main tensions highlighted in the discussion: the characteristics of women versus the characteristics of men, the self versus the community, and the organization vis-à-vis the family.

First, it was clear to the women that the different characteristics of men and women affected their leadership styles. Men were perceived to be more prone to conflict while women were seen to be more able to manage and calm down conflict – this was seen in their response plans during demolitions with women as the frontliners. In dialogue and negotiation, women were accordingly more knowledgeable (“*mas malawakang kaisipan*”) than men (“*isa lang 'yung masasabi niya*”). Men were more rule-oriented in estate management; women were more relational in enforcing the rules. Men were seen as merely talkers (“*salita lang*”), while women were hands-on and persistent (“*makulit, matiyaga*”).

For the women leaders, it was clear that much of their leadership was grounded on their characteristics as women. This was evident in times of dialogue when the women would use their emotions as a strategy in order to clearly explain their demands. According to them, persistence is also a trait of women and this served them well during negotiations. Women were also described as more relational – mostly manifesting in the way they would talk to their members – and this allowed the women leaders to better build connections with members as well as enforce rules.

When it came to livelihood, men were those who worked to sustain the family; but in the women's view, they could also

do the men's work. This was also why they pointed out that the burden on women was much heavier than men's. Here is also where the public-private split becomes evident: the women see themselves as capable in the public sphere but also retain duties in the private sphere, culminating in a double burden for these women leaders.

Second, the tension between the self and the community was often resolved in favor of the community: “*Hindi para sa akin eh. May iba kasi ang makikinabang mahigit. Hindi 'yun ako. Ako, ginamit ko nga lang 'yung sarili ko para sa iba.*” This was seen in all the sacrifices that the women did: leaving their work or businesses, sacrificing time with their families, and dedicating themselves to the struggle, to the point of neglecting the self. This was also echoed in how the women leaders mothered their community and “adopted” members; while they may not have had time for their own children, they treated the larger community as their children and family.

Lastly, the dynamic between the organization and family was different for each leader at different times. Three kinds of dynamics stood out: problems in the family can prevent their involvement (such as women leaders having to leave their organizational duties behind for a time in order to focus on addressing certain family issues), the absence of family can provide an imperative for involvement (such as those women who joined meetings because their husbands could not or did not do so, or those who were single), or the presence of family complicates involvement (almost all the women leaders can identify with this dynamic, especially those with children). However, the mothers often resolved this tension with the justification of pointing to the greater community and explaining to their children that this was not just for their own benefit but for all.

Conclusions

The use of a gender lens in examining the case of community organizing in APOAMF brings to the fore an interrogation of gender roles and gender dynamics within the community and within the process of community organizing itself.

Over the course of asserting their rights, it became evident that the women were crucial to achieve the goals of their struggle: safe and decent housing. They contributed to the struggle for housing in Manggahan by accomplishing both physical and relational tasks of leadership in the struggle – from mobilization to dialogue and estate management. However, it also became clear that as the women contributed

much, they also sacrificed much – time away from family and their children, especially, became emotionally taxing.

The process that the women went through in asserting their rights is difficult in itself, but in community organizing, this case showed that women were both empowered and further burdened. It is here that the gender framework of the public and private spheres shows that while rights may be won in the public sphere, it should not be to the detriment of women's freedom to choose how to live their lives in the private sphere. Instead, as “the right to housing is also a women's right that the government is mandated to provide” [4], the provision of safe and decent housing must truly empower women in both the public and private spheres.

As a review of theory in practice, the experiences of the women may also act as a critique of the Alinsky theory in practice. The Alinsky model that was primarily used in organizing the APOAMF community may be insufficient when it comes to gender and the impact of community organizing on women. Alinsky himself was skeptical of women organizers and downplayed what they could contribute to community organizing [6]. Thus, there is a need to recognize these biases in the theory in order to adjust implementation in praxis.

Empowerment in the context of organized women community leaders still carries the separation and tensions of the public-private divide. Consequently, although applying an Alinsky-inspired model of community organizing in Philippine communities (like APOAMF) has empowered women in the public sphere as formal organization leaders, it has also placed them in difficult tensions between the two spheres that require them to sacrifice much in the private sphere. Community organizing then, aside from raising the consciousness of the people regarding the issue, must also include raising awareness on gender roles and dynamics: building a struggle that does not replicate systems of oppression on its path to liberation.

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