

P O L I C Y P A P E R

Global assembly on everyday life, gender, and sexuality: Reflections, recommendations, and way forward

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ABSTRACT

Five key policy recommendations were generated from the presentations and discussions in the Global Assembly on Everyday Life, Gender, and Sexuality. The rich source of information supporting the recommendations was the exploration of effective methods of promoting social change through education and research from networks and partnerships. The movement created by collective and participatory approaches in policy development counters the limitations of some societies where gender and sexuality are taboo. Enabling laws is essential, but the implementing guidelines should consider the real-world experience and realize that adequate infrastructure, processes, and resources are necessary. Education of the people on gender and sexuality must start early in life to plant a seed to develop values that uphold respect for human rights and civic responsibility.

Current Realities

The Philippines remains the top Asian country in closing the gender gap based on the 2021 report published by the World Economic Forum. This means that the government has been doing various actions to equalize men and women in terms of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. Moreover, the Philippines was also recognized as one of the top gay-friendly countries in Asia. These accolades resonate with the advancement of the gender situation in the country. Currently, there is a growing but still uncoordinated recognition of LGBTI rights within the Philippine legal system. The Supreme Court has recognized a constitutional policy on non-discrimination of LGBTI people. The state has yet to fully implement a solid legal framework within which LGBTI rights are recognized, enforced, and upheld (Vergara).

Even with a growing awareness of and about the LGBT community, LGBT Filipinos continue to face challenges. Many LGBT Filipinos lack information about numerous concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity. Many LGBT Filipinos are unfamiliar with the distinctions of the sectors included in the "LGBT" acronym. The absence of a

united front is also a problem. It has been noted that within the gay community, there are subcultures based on age, profession, class, and even ethnicity, with each of these subcultures, further subdivided (Tan & Castro, 2000). Thus, the plight of LGBT Filipinos continues to be challenging, even if there are instances of success and hope for the LGBT community (United Nations Development Program & United States Agency for International Development, 2014).

In addition, there is always the presence of the flip side of the coin, which is composed of sharp contradictions. Discriminations against women and members of the LGBT+ community persist that are further aggravated by violence, unequal provision of opportunities, and absence of protection across verticals of the society. Also, there is a rising number of toxic masculinity issues that negatively pressure men. Hence, there is a need for a safe platform that could enable people and communities to discuss openly and propel solutions toward gender equality. There are still various reports on the few labors and political representation of women, as well as with the members of the LGBT community. There is also the absence of a law protecting people from discrimination based on gender alone.

The Assembly

The Global Assembly on Everyday Life, Gender, and Sexuality was conceptualized to become an international safe space to connect advocates, professionals, students, and other individuals interested in the intersections of everyday life (occupation), gender, and sexuality. Its goals are to facilitate the exchange of research, creative works, policies, and other innovative endeavors that focus on everyday life, gender, and sexuality, formulate policy direction and forge linkages with international collaborators, industry, and government agencies toward the achievement of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals #5 on gender equality. In this event in October 2021, through the collaboration of the University of the Philippines Center for Gender and Women Studies (UP CGWS) and the International Network on Sexualities and Genders within Occupational Therapy and Occupational Science (SexGen-OTOS), an international network of occupational therapists and scientists advocating for a better understanding of gender and sexuality in daily occupations has brought together more than 600 participants from across 15 countries where productive discourse happened through poster and oral presentations, film festival, and plenary sessions.

Key Insights

The discussions in the plenary sessions, workshops, and oral research presentations were rich in a context that defined the peculiarities of the experiences in the short films shown during the Global Assembly. The following insights were generated from the proceedings of the event and were related to the authors' experiences in different gender-related advocacies.

1. Representation across the gender spectrum

People are unique from each other. Each identifies himself or herself as different from another in various ways such as in identity and experience relating to gender and sexuality. This perspective was highlighted by the papers submitted to the Assembly, emphasizing the importance of the representation of each person so that others may be aware and understand unique standpoints and narratives. In the works of Arago *et al.* (2021), the different stories of gay individuals during the pandemic were highlighted such as the lack of access to medical and psychosocial services which reveal that there are basic needs neglected during these times. Similarly, the untold stories of members of the LGBT+ community in an educational setting showed that

essential milestones in the life of the LGBT, like coming out and self-disclosure, affect their participation in class and extra-curricular activities (UP-CGWS, 2021).

There are possible ways to overcome the challenges posed by an unsupportive environment and society. One practical way was shown by the study by Cabrera and Jamias (2021), using visual images to emphasize relatable gender-related life situations. The use of accessible methods to enhance the public's understanding of gender and sexuality such as films, stories, and visual arts were showcased in the event. The inclusion of the film festival in the Assembly, aside from the usual research abstracts and papers, also emphasized the inclusiveness and systems approach to gender and development to achieve gender equality.

2. Gender and sexuality in everyday life

One of the vital goals of the assembly is to emphasize the discussion that gender and sexuality are part of living expressed and experienced in different occupations. As previously discussed, this was achieved by the various submissions of films from other countries. The top 10 short films shared the journey of individuals and groups on how to normalize experiences in multiple settings of individuals from different gender spectrums. The most valuable learning is the public involvement in sharing their insight, experience, and life work to advance gender equality and enable individuals who are discriminated because of their gender to maximize their full potential in nation-building.

3. Importance of enabling national and local policies

Legislative frameworks on gender issues passed into law are vital in creating whole-of-systems and whole-of-society approaches that will enforce change. For example, the evolution of the integration of topics on gender and sexuality across all educational levels in the Philippines became possible with the passage of laws specifically the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law (RA 10354). Similarly, Ireland's gender-affirming healthcare was also only implemented through the National Gender Service upon passing the Transgender Rights Bill in 2015. These enabling laws pave the way for multi-sectoral efforts at national and local levels. These also ensure the sustainability of programs and services to realize the goals of gender equality.

The Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710), which mandates all sectors of society to support the actualization of human potential through a participatory, empowering, and

equitable process of gender development planning and implementation, is a rich source of experience that can be adopted to plan programs for a more inclusive society.

Highlighted in the global assembly discussions is the perpetuating legislative framework that gender and sexuality are the sources of risk or threat to a healthy life and neglecting the fact that these are a human experience integral to daily living—because of this, the implementing rules and regulations focus on addressing the complications of non-adherence rather than supporting mechanisms that will enable gender equality and reduce inequalities.

4. Integration of gender and sexuality education

Gender perspectives are deeply ingrained in gender norms. The formation of gender identity entails both cognitive and affective development in early childhood. This principle is crucial in early introducing gender awareness and socio-emotional development subjects. The DepEd Order No. 31 on policy guidelines for the inclusion of sexuality-affecting behaviors, health, and life in primary schools is based on the premise that sexuality education starts with early learning stages as children socialize and build the confidence of finding who they are. This experience will build upon prior knowledge as the child advances to higher education, focusing on intellectual competencies, personal empowerment, and civic responsibilities to uphold sexuality as a fundamental human right (CHED CMO No 1, ser 2015).

While enabling laws support the integration of gender and sexuality in the educational system, the systemic issues of unprepared and underfinanced schools deter the achievement of implementation targets. Teenage pregnancy and gender-based harassment continue to rise in educational institutions.

These were issues shared in the conference that need to be explored in research to provide direction in developing context-driven educational models for integrating gender and sexuality into the curriculum.

5. Unique experiences related to sex, gender, and sexuality

- a. Menstrual hygiene. Menstruation is normal vaginal bleeding that occurs as part of a woman's monthly cycle. As women anticipate this monthly, menstrual hygiene is usually observed. But as Aung (2021)

shared, menstrual hygiene in Myanmar is receiving little attention. This study mainly looked at Buddhist nuns' practices to assess characteristics and factors associated with menstrual hygiene practices in Myanmar. This study showed that the majority (81%) had good knowledge, but only 10.6% had favorable cues to actions: information, materials, supplies, and facilities. Despite this, 77% had good practices. The study concluded that efforts in increasing cues to action are recommended to increase their practices further. The paper is a good reminder that things such as menstrual hygiene are usually taken for granted, but is essential as it constitutes an important part of a woman's life.

- b. Abortion. Abortion is the termination of a pregnancy by removing or expelling an embryo or fetus. It can occur without intervention or, more commonly known as spontaneous or induced, when deliberate steps are taken to end a pregnancy. Abortion has been reported even before. In the paper by Dechavez-Jareno (2021), a phenomenological analysis of abortion experiences of five female adolescents aged 16 to 18 was done. This study showed that up to this time, the burden attributed to abortion is still evident and should be considered an important issue affecting women in our society.
- c. Men having sex with men (MSM). Since 1990 or earlier, the term men who have sex with men has been in public health discussions especially in HIV/AIDS. One abstract presented at the Conference (De Torres, 2021) discussed the significance of self-control to the sexual risk behaviors of MSM. Self-control includes recognition of sexual impulses, rationalization of sexual risk perceptions, and regulating sexual risk behaviors. This is important to empower MSM to make conscious and responsible decisions, actions, and reflections toward safer sex practices, better sexual health, and lower HIV risk. Self-control is not a common aspect of MSM discussed in studies. This study emphasized its importance and impact that might warrant further research.

6. Leadership of women

According to the Pew Research Center survey on women and leadership, most respondents find women indistinguishable from men in key leadership traits such as intelligence and

capacity (Pew Research Center 2015). Nevertheless, women are in short supply at the top of government and business. It's not that they lack toughness, management chops, or proper skill sets. It's also not all about work-life balance. In fact, only one out of five would say that the reason there aren't more females in top leadership positions is because of their responsibility to their family. Topping the list of reasons is still the double standard for women. Just as in the political realm, the public does not see significant differences between men and women in key business leadership qualities. Where they see gaps, women have a clear advantage over men in honesty and ethics, providing fair pay and benefits, and offering mentorship to young employees. Men have an edge in being willing to take risks and negotiate profitable deals. In the Philippines women have been regarded as leaders also in different aspects of society. In the abstract by Bangsoy (2021), women hold leadership roles in the Alliance of People's Organizations Along Manggahan Floodway (APOAMF), a people's organization in Pasig City. The women's contributions included leadership's physical, relational, and emotional aspects. However, as they contributed to the struggle for the benefit of the broader community, the women also had to deal with personal sacrifices.

Despite the social recognition of the role of women nowadays as leaders, a significant body of research shows there is subtle gender bias that persists in organizations and society that disrupts the learning cycle at the heart of becoming a leader. The context must support a woman's motivation to lead and increase the likelihood that others will recognize and encourage her efforts.

Recommendations

1. Normalize gender and sexuality discussions in conferences, public fora, and assemblies to increase multi-sectoral engagements advancing gender-based advocacies. The use of multimedia and creative arts showing the daily experiences of individuals from the gender spectrum is an example of a practical strategy to promote public awareness and understanding.
2. Utilize education as an avenue to facilitate societal change towards values formation, gender sensitivity, protection of human rights, and civic responsibility for gender equality. Introduce sexuality in early childhood education to promote gender awareness and build upon prior experiences to advance the cognitive and affective competencies.
3. Utilize participatory and empowering approaches to gender and development policy formulation to ensure relevant and sustainable programs that are responsive to the needs of the people.
4. Mainstream gender equality perspective in the development and evaluation of policies on education and health through research, benchmarking, and sharing best practices using various tools available to the local setting.
5. Create networks and partnerships to promote societal understanding of gender diversity and inclusiveness to decrease discrimination, marginalization, and harassment.

Way Forward

The Global Assembly on Everyday Life, Gender, and Sexuality brought many issues to the forefront that are worthy of further exploration to advance gender equality. The insights discussed emphasized the gains of a long-time advocacy and innovative strategies to overcome the challenges of discrimination and marginalization in most societies that consider gender taboo..

Identified gains that will promote significant societal change to normalize gender and sexuality as part of living are laws that enable participative and empowering strategies to create whole-of-society programs and services responsive to the needs of the population. Another is introducing early childhood education on sexuality to build cognitive and affective competencies anchored in upholding human rights. Lastly, working on evidence-based gender and development policies in educational systems (from primary to higher education) to emphasize that quality education emanates from a supportive, inclusive, and safe environment.

The practical importance of gender-sensitivity education in workplaces, schools, faith-based centers, health-care centers, and community settings is well established. Still, it is best to explore further by conducting multi-sectoral conferences and forums like the Global Assembly because it increases the depth and breadth of engagements and discussions about gender and sexuality. The research, innovations, and advocacies shared are rich sources to support laws, policies, and services toward achieving SDG #5 on gender equality.

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