



# Localization of Gender Equality as a Goal of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Philippines

Arief Wicaksono<sup>(✉)</sup> and Andi Burchanuddin

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP), Universitas Bosowa Makassar, Kota Makassar, Indonesia

[arief.wicaksono@universitasbosowa.ac.id](mailto:arief.wicaksono@universitasbosowa.ac.id)

**Abstract.** This study intends to localize international norms that are then accepted into local norms in order to assess the Philippines' progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on gender equality. The research approach is qualitative, and the data gathering strategy makes use of literature review, particularly the idea of "norm localization" put forth by Amitav Acharya. The results of this study indicate that even in a patriarchal culture, the Philippines' efforts to achieve the points and values of the SDGs are not a barrier to continuing to realize the goals. The Philippines' efforts to apply gender equality are also inseparable from the contribution of local aspects, such as the contribution of the government, which is assisted by the local women's movement known as the Philippine Women's Commission (PCW) in managing gender relations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), the ASEAN Women's Committee, and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are just a few of the international standards that the Philippine government firmly supports.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality · Norm · Localization · SDGS · Philippines · PCW

## 1 Introduction

Gender equality is part of a global strategy that promotes equal rights between women and men around the world. Gender equality is also a goal to be achieved by governments and international organizations and has become an international agreement and commitment of governments around the world [1].

Gender equality was included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the United Nations General Assembly ratified on December 10, 1948. However, it wasn't until the 1970s that the International Women's Conference and the declaration of 1975 as the International Year of Women gave gender equality a boost. Mexico City hosted the first World about Women event.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified by the UN General Assembly in 1979. The Convention defines

discrimination against women and sets forth a national action plan to end it. The Convention emphasizes how culture and custom impact gender roles and family interactions and supports women's reproductive rights for the first time in a human rights convention.

Five years after the event in Mexico City, the second World Conference on Women was held in Copenhagen in 1980. The ensuing Program of Action emphasized the need for more robust national policies to ensure women have control over and ownership over their property, as well as improved rights for women with regard to inheritance, child custody, and losing their citizenship.

Gender mainstreaming efforts are also one of the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while the goal is achieved at point 5 of the SDGs, which is committed to gender equality and aims to "achieve gender equality and uphold all women and girls." This fifth aim specifies objectives that face a number of difficulties, including violence against women, discrimination against women, reproductive health, property rights, and the use of technology that is gender inclusive. However, global progress towards this goal will not be easy. Despite impressive progress, such as in requiring girls to receive primary education, in many other areas. In fact, achieving gender equality is still out of reach, especially in developing country like Philippines.

In the 12 months preceding to the poll, 15% of women reported experiencing violence, and 24% of married women reported having physical, sexual, or emotional abuse from a partner in their lifetimes, according to the 2017 Philippines National Demographic and Health poll. Since they were 15 years old, 17% of all women (ages 15 to 49) had experienced physical violence. Among them, 73% of married women are cases committed by ex-husbands or husbands/partners, while 51% of women have experienced never having a relationship with someone. People get married, parents or stepparents get married. Among all women (15 – 49 years), 5% had experienced sexual violence, and the most common perpetrator was a current or previous husband, partner, or boyfriend. Whereas those who experienced it, only 34% asked for help from the existing formal system [2].

The data shows that there are indications of exploitation that must be experienced by women and girls, this is a form of fraud against human rights in Philippines. Within the SDG's framework in which the Philippines pursues the achievement of gender equality goal - it is not easy for the Philippines to realize a gender mainstreaming strategy in a society with a strong patriarchal culture and eastern customs. In Southeast Asia, patriarchy creates a dichotomy between the public and private spheres, which freely causes harm to women. Women are increasingly marginalized in all aspects of life.

However, the Philippines serves as a good example of how gender mainstreaming may be established, implemented, and routinely reviewed. The Philippines Commission for Women, formerly known as the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, is the primary agency responsible for formulating and coordinating policies related to gender issues. It is housed inside the President's Office. Gender machinery and gender mainstreaming are at a more advanced stage in the Philippines as a result of early 1990s laws focusing on gender mainstreaming, such as the Women in Nation-Building Act and the Philippine Development Plan for Women. Because it provides a 30-year perspective plan outlining the policies, strategies, programs, and projects that the government must adopt to enable women to participate in and benefit from national development,

**Table 1.** The global gender gap index rankings east asia and the pacific region, 2021.

Country	Rank		Score
	Regional	Global	
New Zealand	1	4	0.840
Philippines	2	17	0.784
Lao PDR	3	37	0.750
Australia	4	53	0.731
Singapore	5	58	0.727

the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development 1995–2025, which was established, is significant. The Magna Carta for Women, established in 2009, now contains the complete gender mainstreaming and development mission [3].

The Philippines is ranked 17th out of 156 countries in the “Global Gender Gap 2021” report, which was released by the World Economic Forum on March 30, 2021, with a score of 0.784. The World Economic Forum shows that the Philippines has narrowed 78.4% of the overall gender gap and is the country with the best gender equality in Asia (See Table 1).

The East Asia and Pacific region’s performance is the best after New Zealand. In addition to almost eliminating its disparities in health, survival, and educational achievement, the Philippines is one of only 18 countries globally to have at least 79.5% of its gaps in economic participation and opportunity removed. The Philippines is one of the few nations to concurrently minimize gender imbalances in senior positions as well as in professional and technical roles, which contributes to these results. But there should be incentives for women to join the larger workforce. Only 49.1% of women are employed, closing the gender gap of only 65.3% according to this metric. Income and pay disparities continue. The average pay gap and income difference still have 22% and 31%, respectively, to close. Only 36.2% of this gap has been addressed in terms of political empowerment thus far. There are still too few female MPs (28%) and ministers (13%) in parliament, despite having a female head of state for more than 15 of the previous 50 years [4].

In the perspective of SDG’s, gender equality is one of 17 goals that must be achieved by 2030. Since the SDGs are universal goals that apply to every nation in the globe, local and regional governments had a significant impact on how they were defined. Based on the description and what I have mention above, it is very interesting to know, how the Philippines’ strategy for the demand to localize the global value of gender equality, so that it gets a very good rating - at least in Asia, a region where people’s lives are still dominated by patriarchal values. We think that the practical knowledge carried out by the Philippines, may also be applied in other countries in Southeast Asia.

## 2 Methods

This study uses a descriptive analytical qualitative research method. In this case, the author tries to describe the occurrence of a phenomenon under study as objectively as possible based on the perspective used by the researcher. Therefore, this paper contains an explanation of the findings and analysis related to the localization process of SDGs norms regarding gender equality in the Philippines. The type of data that we use in this paper is secondary data, which we obtained from various electronic journals, various electronic books and also from various official websites that are relevant to the efforts and progress of the Philippines in achieving the SDGs goal of gender equality. The analysis technique that I use is a data analysis technique that is based on Constructivism perspective in international relations and emphasizes non-mathematical data.

## 3 Result and Discussion

Gender issues are very complex in the Philippines, with some of the most influential factors being the religion, culture of the people and limited access to important resources. As a result, the Philippines experiences many gender issues that need to be addressed, as well as various forms of discrimination and human rights violations, especially women's issues, which are receiving increasing attention from the government.

The Philippines is a secular country, according to its Constitution, which mandates the separation of church and state, while also demanding that the government accept all religions equally. So based on the 2015 census conducted by the Philippine Statistical Authority (PSA), there are 9% of the population who attend the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), United Methodists, Episcopal Church in the Philippines, Bible Baptist Church, other Protestant churches, Witnesses -Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The remaining population is 79.5 percent, made up of Roman Catholics. The Kingdom of Jesus Christ, Name Over Name, Members of the International Church of God, and local churches such as Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ), Independent Church of the Philippines (Aglipayan or IFI), and Name Over Every Name are examples of other Christian groups.

The National Commission on Muslims of the Philippines (NCMF) pegs the percentage of Muslims in the population as 10 to 11 percent, whereas based on PSA estimates, this is 6 percent. The NCMF stated its higher estimate was due to various reasons, Islamists' unwillingness to register with civil registry offices or participate in official surveys, for example, as well as the transience of society brought on by internal migration for employment and the government's failure to adequately study Muslim neighborhoods and communities. According to the PSA, approximately 4 percent of those surveyed in the 2015 census did not report a religious affiliation or belonged to other faiths, such as animism or indigenous syncretic faiths [5].

With the composition of the majority religion in the Philippines being Catholic, members of this religion are firmly steadfast in the once-in-a-lifetime marriage bond. This provision then triggers the problems experienced by Filipino women. But because precisely according to their religious understanding that there is no such thing as divorce. It is believed that people who are married will not get divorced, therefore, the mechanism

that can be taken is the annulment of the marriage. However, it is very rare for Filipino women to annul a marriage because it takes a lot of time, the bureaucracy is complex, the process is long, and the costs are very expensive.

This patriarchal system is also embraced by Filipino society. In terms of work, women experience limitations in getting access to work outside the home because they are busy as housewives. Working outside the home also does not result in liberation because most are still dominated by men. Most of the jobs open to women are usually extensions of the caregiving, educational roles they perform at home: teacher, nurse, midwife, social worker, self-employed, salesperson and other side jobs in the service sector. In the last two decades, female workers were lured to export-oriented manufacturing industries.

This patriarchal system is also embraced by Filipino society. In terms of work, women experience limitations in getting access to work outside the home because they are busy as housewives. Because most jobs outside the house are still held by men, doing so does not lead to liberation either. Most of the jobs open to women are usually extensions of the caregiving, educational roles they perform at home: teacher, nurse, midwife, social worker, self-employed, salesperson and other side jobs in the service sector. In the last two decades, female workers were lured to export-oriented manufacturing industries but women always received lower wages than man.

About 41% of the female population of the Philippines are unemployed. As workers, they tend to occupy lower positions. In 2011, they represented only 25% of managerial and executive positions. Women are generally paid less. This situation is often associated with the stigma against women who are categorized as having low skills, working shorter hours because they have a double burden and less experience.

According to 2020 World Development Indicators data from the World Bank, the decline in women's work participation in the Southeast Asian region was most severe in the Philippines. In 2019 the work participation of Filipino women is at the level of 46.5. However, in 2020 the number dropped to 42.62 or decreased by 8.35% [6].

With 78.4% of the overall gender gap already narrowed, the Philippines has dropped one slots to take up position 17 in the Global Gender Gap Report 2021. The best performer in the Pacific and East Asia region, after New Zealand, is this one. The Philippines is one of only 18 countries in the world that has closed at least 79.5% of its economic participation and opportunity gap. In addition, differences in survival, health, and educational performance are also almost eliminated. Part of the credit for this result goes to the Philippines, one of the few countries to have narrowed the gender gap in senior positions as well as in professional and technical fields.

However, women should be given incentives to join the wider labor force. Considering that just 49.1% of women hold jobs, only 65.3% of the gender gap has been closed. In comparison to the 36.2% of the political empowerment gap that has already been closed, similar gaps in income and wages still exist, with an average of 22% of the income gap and 31% of the salary gap still unbridged. Despite more than 15 of the preceding 50 years having a female head of state, there are still insufficient numbers of women serving in parliament (28%) and among ministers (13%) (WEF, March 2021).

This circumstance demonstrates that patriarchy is one of the barriers to the advancement of gender equality in the Philippines. The notion that women are lower than men makes many women lose opportunities to show their abilities and contributions in terms

of economic development, even though women are the first financial processors in the family.

Resources in the economic context do not only concern the financial aspect but include all types of wealth that can improve the welfare of society in a broad sense. Politically, poverty is evident due to the limited access to power. The political structure that can influence a group's capacity to access and make use of resources is included in the concept of power in this context [7].

Women's limited access to production sources or productive assets such as land or houses, for example, also determines whether women have access to capital or credit. Because productive assets are controlled by men. If a woman wants to carry out economic activities related to these assets, she must first obtain permission from her husband. This relates to decision making or production control which is dominated by men. With limited control over production assets, women also have very limited access to credit (because they do not have collateral) so that this results in limitations for women in developing their businesses.

These access limitations are mostly experienced by Filipino women who live in coastal or marginalized areas. They don't know that they can be involved in decision-making, therefore Filipino women still rely on the ruling government and accept all decisions issued. For example, women who live in the coastal area of Sorsogon, Philippines. Most of the women there only carry out their daily activities by farming and helping their husbands manage the fish they catch. They clean, weigh and sell the fish at the market, where the proceeds are managed for various family needs. This business makes them not understand that they can be directly involved in the decision-making process, because they only understand how to get profits and manage these profits for various family needs.

International norms develop from domestic norms which are transformed into international norms thanks to the promotion of an actor. The norms that have been promoted at the international level will then drop back to the domestic level, penetrate the state filter created by domestic norms, and then replace domestic norms. This series of processes is what is meant by the diffusion of international norms [8]. This is also the case in the Philippines, where the Philippines has made the localization flow of international norms to achieve gender equality in the Philippines.

Adding to the work of Finnemore and Sikkink on norm localization, Amitav Acharya points out the importance of a strategy for norm diffusion by domestic actors, followed by localization of norms to regions. In order for a norm to be accepted by other countries in the region, three conditions must be met, namely: (1) the norm that is disseminated is a universal norm, such as the prohibition of racism, biological problems, and obligations in human rights issues. (2) The need for actors transnationally to socialize norms, and (3) although the ultimate goal is to transmit norms to the regions, it is necessary to convert them rather than disputes or contestations by domestic/local actors [9].

Applying the Acharya's framework requires taking into account a number of factors on how standards are incorporated into each nation's domestic laws. Following are a few responses that the state accepts:

- Resistance, which means that the state won't make any modifications to the laws and other legal instruments. Persistent resistance causes the transmission of norms to fail, even while the state is still working toward the objectives of local or internal norms;
- Localization entails the creation of new tools and tasks by the government as well as the modification or alteration of the intended rules. However, the order in which institutions adopt standards will not alter or will only alter in accordance with the current example.
- Replacement, as in the state will replace current regional customs. This seldom ever occurs because the new standard is a global one that really promotes cooperation.

Furthermore, in the localization process itself, there are four conditions that become the measure of the localization process. The first condition is the rejection condition, in which domestic actors reject external norms because of uncertainty about the future and doubts about the ability of norms to change preconceived beliefs, practices, and ideas. This may be because domestic norms are still very strong and trustworthy, although in some cases they are not entirely true.

The second condition is the initiative and pre-localization of domestic actors. In this context, the status of domestic actors as external normative bearers begins to emerge. Domestic actors began to see the function and potential of external norms to increase efficiency and create legitimacy of existing institutions without weakening them. This situation demands the presence of domestic actors who are credible and able to bring external norms into the domestic sphere.

The third condition is localization. In this case, domestic actors try to invite people to accept norms through argumentation and modify norms through policies to make them appear in accordance with domestic norms, and the last condition is institutionalization, which is the stage of implementing new tools and practices based on external norms that have been adapted to domestic norms [9].

### **3.1 Pre-localization (Resistance and Contestation)**

In the Philippines itself, it can be said that the process of pre-localization of SDGs values is quite smooth, this is allegedly due to the background of the women's movement which is considered to be very active and dynamic. This puts the issue of gender equality at the forefront of national discourse and hinders the degrading status of women in modern Filipino society. In addition, because there are organizations and NGOs that support gender equality and other related women's issues.

However, the thing that might hinder is the patriarchal and dictatorial culture that many ancient Filipinos still embraced and understood. However, behind this, the Philippines, with a long background and history of women's struggles in all fields for the fulfillment of equal rights, continues to develop, resulting in many local actors fighting for gender equality, such as Corazon Aquino, who was the first female president in Philippines [10].

### 3.2 Local Initiatives (Entrepreneurship and Framing)

In the Philippines, there are female figures who play an important role in efforts to place women to be actively involved in all fields, namely former President Maria Corazon Sumulong Cojuangco Aquino (Cory Aquino) and former President Maria Gloria Macaraeg Macapagal Arroyo.

With their initiative too, the Philippine government has succeeded in upholding international commitments to be applied in everyday life. The ASEAN Committee on Women, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the PER Beijing Platform for Action, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are a few of the pledges mentioned above.

### 3.3 Adaptation (Grafting and Pruning)

In this condition, the commitments or international norms that have been adopted will be reconstructed to conform to local beliefs and practices. For example, the international commitment was adopted and implemented in the form of an institution, namely the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW). After Corazon Aquino won the People's Power Revolution and became power in 1986, the agency concentrated on the participation of women in politics and policymaking. The 1987 Philippine Constitution was amended to embrace the idea of gender equality.

Between 1989 and 1992, the "Women in Nation-Building Act" (RA 7192) and the Philippine Development Plan for Women (PDPW) were both passed. Additionally, a drive to train government employees and officials in promoting equality was backed by the Gender and Development (GAD) program, run by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

The Philippines Plan for Gender-Responsive growth (PPGD), a plan with a 30-year outlook, describes the policies that allow women to benefit from the advantages of national growth, is one of the policies that PCW continues to campaign for between 1995 and 2025. This served as a blueprint for the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), which was approved during the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Through this, there are 12 areas of concern to the international community related to a comprehensive commitment plan for supporting equality between men and women, which include: (1) women and poverty; (2) women's education and training; (3) women and health; (4) violence against women; and (5) armed conflict with women. Girls; (6) Women and the economy; (7) Women with decision-making authority and rights; (8) Institutional mechanisms; (9) Women's Human Rights; (10) Women and the media; (11) Women and the environment, and (12) girls (Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), n.d.)

In the adaptation condition that Acharya had conveyed, not only PCW was the only actor who played a role, but there was also Republic Act 9170 - Magna Charta for Women (MCW), which is a form of the Philippines' commitment to CEDAW. When updating the constitution or introducing new comprehensive laws promoting women's rights and gender equality, CEDAW serves as a guide. The Philippines, for example, employed CEDAW principles when updating or creating their national constitution.

A comprehensive law related to women's human rights was approved by the Philippine government in 2009 with number 9170, so this is the basis for MCW, in relation to the elimination of discrimination, protection, fulfillment and promotion for Filipino women. Magna Charta extensively draws from CEDAW's rules, particularly in the definition of gender discrimination and in its special clauses. Additionally, the Magna Charta of Women contains regulations that prevent women and girls from not receiving equal treatment in all spheres of life and from not receiving equal treatment under the law.

Through its participation in the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) as an ASEAN member state, the Philippines actively promotes gender equality. ACW was established in 1976 with the purpose of carrying out, coordinating, and supervising the implementation of ASEAN regional goals for women's concerns at all levels of political, economic, and social life. In order to implement the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children, ACW and the ASEAN Committee on the Rights of Women and Children first convened in 2014 to discuss creating a regional action plan. (ASEAN RPA on EVAW).

The Philippines implements the SDGs by including gender mainstreaming into the Philippine Development Program (PDP) document and localizing it through Regional Development Plans (RDP) and Comprehensive Development Plans (CDP). By identifying provincial and municipal indicators that will carry out and contribute to the achievement of the goals and targets articulated in the Philippines Development Plan outcome areas and Sustainable Development Goals 2017–2022, the country also aims to localize national and regional indicators through the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).

The Philippines has Executive Order No. 27 which contains orders to local governments to implement the Philippine Development Program (PDP) 2017–2022. There are three aspects to be achieved in the PDP, namely *malasakit* (concern), *pagbabago* (renewal), and *patuloy na pag-unlad* (sustainable progress). “The main goal is for people to have a settled, comfortable, and secure life”. To support this, there are several programs promoted by the central government and local governments in the Philippines to achieve the SDGs. First, the Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS), which is a data collection program by the local government to then be presented as graphs and maps. The data collected are in the form of health, poverty, nutrition, water availability, education, and income. Second, the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* (4P) which is a program to provide social assistance to very poor families and have children between the ages of 0–18 years. There are two types of assistance, namely health assistance in the form of 500 pesos per month and educational assistance in the form of 300 pesos for each child per month for ten months in a year a maximum of 3 children per family [11].

### 3.4 Upgrades and “Universalization”

After the process of adopting or localizing international commitments into the Philippines' national rules which are compiled in Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) is carried out at this stage, the improvement process is also divided into 3 parts, all of which are mutually sustainable. In the first part, there is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) 1995, from which there have been improvements in the form of five main aspects to accelerate progress during the period 2014 – 2019, one of which

is the enactment of RA 1120 or the Law on Maternity Leave of 105 Days. Then in the process of improvement by the ASEAN Committee on Women, here it is more to ensure women and empower women in the economic sphere. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also play a role in the final improvement, which takes the form of full and aggressive implementation of RA 10354 and RA 9710, Presidential Decree 79, 1972 series, and other relevant national interventions that support and strengthen networks for all Filipinos' reproductive rights. Family planning services as well as maternal and adolescent health care.

## 4 Conclusion

In general, it can be claimed that the Philippines is in a position to demonstrate to the rest of the world how gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls can be achieved through strong institutionalization and effective governance. Even though it is in the midst of a patriarchal culture, the Philippines' efforts to achieve the points and values of the SDGs do not prevent it from continuing to realize the goal of gender equality.

The Philippine government is firmly dedicated to the international standards that have been agreed, including CEDAW, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the ASEAN Committee on Women, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) of 1995. The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) is the entity that has embraced and is carrying out these four promises. As a result, PCW is now the leading organization on problems relating to gender equality and the empowerment of Filipino women, particularly those who are marginalized.

In addition to PCW, there is also Republic Act 9170 – Magna Carta of Women (MCW) which is the implementation and form of the Philippines' commitment to CEDAW. MCW contains laws protecting women and girls to get equal treatment in all areas of life. Then also, the efforts of the Philippine government by looking at existing laws created based on international norms and development action plans that all involve aspects of gender equality and always try to improve services and evaluations in the field of gender equality.

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