

Confluence and Contradictions: MAKALAYA's* *Struggle in Forging Partnership for Women in the Communities and the Trade Unions***

Two successful and yet peaceful revolutions in less than 20 years is a prominent badge of democracy for the Philippines. However, the country appears to be stuck in time as the political-economic elite that ruled the country for decades remain powerful, poverty is still pervasive, and the gap among the rich and poor is still wide. Revolutions that oust discredited leaders are “picnics” for Filipinos but it seems that social element of these upheavals never shook the foundations of the old system. For one, patriarchy remains embedded in the fabric of the society. While gains were made across the years Filipino women are still far from creating gender parity in the many areas of the society. Gender equality is still an unfinished revolution with the labor market and the trade union movement as one of the most difficult arenas for change. The journey has started and the road ahead is long. It is still indeed a very difficult revolution in a country known for people power revolts that installed women presidents.

This paper is a contribution on the debate if the issue of women and unions is still the most difficult revolution. The experiences of workingwomen in the Philippines validate this hypothesis. This paper on MAKALAYA women solidarity network will focus on the organization's goal to enhance community/union connections as it struggle for women empowerment. This goal is anchored on the imperative that unionism must adapt to the new realities of the labor market. The shrinking formal employment, the diminishing role of formal unions and collective bargaining, and the imperative of workers protection in contingent employment provided the backdrop for the emergence of MAKALAYA. The network endeavors to fuse the organizational needs of women in the community (especially in the informal sector) and those in the trade unions. Thus, this paper intends to:

1. outline and reflect on the issues that prompted the establishment of the organization
2. share the experiences of organizing the women workers from both the community and the trade unions into a solidarity network (MAKALAYA)
3. present both the usefulness as well as the dilemmas and dynamics of connecting the communities and the trade unions into a single organization

The first part of the paper will give an overview of the situation of women in politics, in the labor market, and in the trade unions. This will be used to contextualize the situation of women workers and facilitate a deeper understanding of the diversity and complexity of the issues and concerns faced by Filipina workers.

The second part of the paper will outline some of the conceptual issues that confronted MAKALAYA, the rationale, history and scope of the network and a general description of its programs and strategies. The confluence of agenda and actions that galvanizes the union-community connection will be elaborated and then followed by an analysis of the issues, dilemmas, obstacles and dynamics in the efforts of the network. These concerns will be juxtaposed with the changing labor market, enduring “gender barriers” in labor organizations, and the differential needs of the women workers.

As the nature of MAKALAYA unfolds and as the struggle goes on, no prescriptions will be offered. Rather an outline of relevant questions that women activists continue to raise in MAKALAYA's struggle in the workers' movement will be presented. By way of conclusion, MAKALAYA has shown that the gender struggle is indeed “assembling a plane in flight”.

* MAKALAYA is the acronym for the Manggagawang Kababaihang Mithi ay Paglaya [*Women Workers Fighting for Freedom*] in the Philippines. It is also the Filipino word for “to be free”.

** By Mylene D. Hega, Deputy Executive Director, Labor Education and Research Network (LEARN) and Secretary General, MAKALAYA. Presented at the Alice Cook Discussion Forums on *Women and Unions: Still the Most Difficult Revolution?*, Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations, 21-22 November 2003, Ithaca, New York

Philippines: Gender Equality Won?

The past two decades saw the “revolution” of women’s role in the Philippine society. Some women have figured prominently in politics and professional careers. In a span of less than 10 years, two women have occupied the presidency. According to the Human Development Report 2002 of UNDP women constitute 35% of Filipino administrators and managers categorizing it as one of the highest in the world. Furthermore, women occupy 17.2% of the all the legislative seats while 2/3 of professionals and technical workers are women. As a result, the country’s Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) was pegged at 0.523 -- the highest in East Asia. Table 1 shows the major gains in terms of women in politics and decision-making.

Table 1: Percentage of Women in Government, Congress, and Judiciary

Field	Percentage
Women government personnel by levels of position (CSC, 1999; * NCRFW, 2002)	
▪ First level	34.6%
▪ Second level	71.9%
▪ Third level	34.8%
▪ Cabinet (Head of Department)	18.2%*
Women in government elective posts (COMELEC, 2001;**House of Representatives, 2003)	
▪ Senate	7.7%
▪ Congress	19.0%**
▪ Governor	19.5%
▪ Vice-Governor	13.0%
▪ Board Member	16.5%
▪ Mayor	15.6%
▪ Vice-Mayor	12.4%
▪ Councilors	17.4%
Incumbent women judges in Philippine courts (Supreme Court, 2001)	21.4%

Source of Table: Hega (2003)

Even in other levels of the State shows some gains. According to the data of the Department of Interior and Local Government, women occupy 90,714 or 25% of the 354,387 total positions in local government units from provincial governors to Sangguniang Kabataan chairpersons (DILG Website, 2003). In particular,

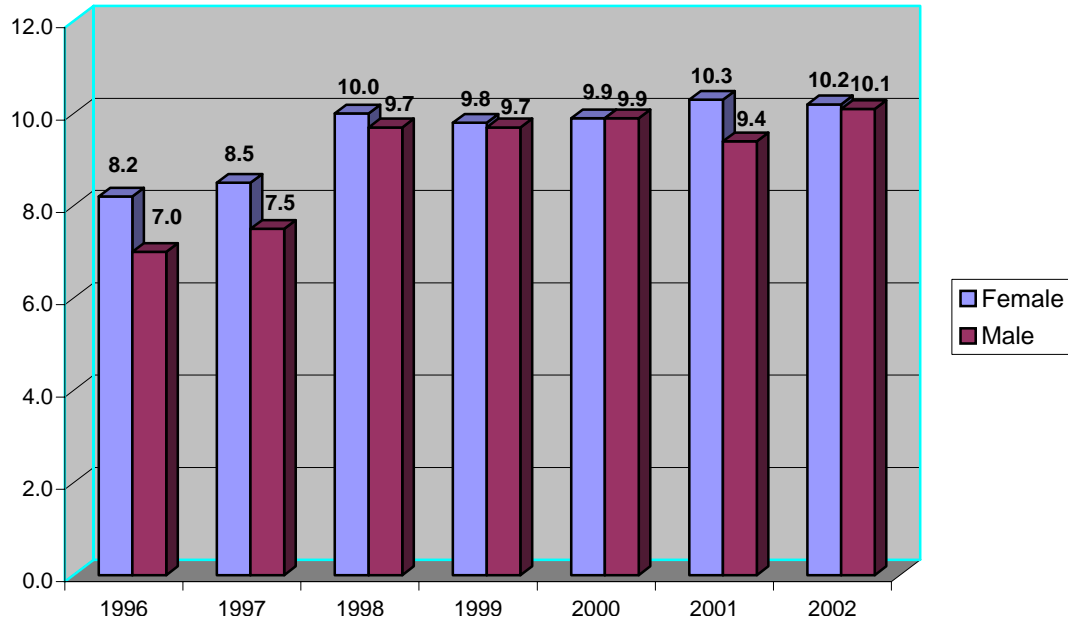
“out of the 354,387 total elective positions, 90,714 positions are occupied by women which includes 16 governors (out of 79), eight vice governors (out of 79), 97 board members, 16 city mayors (out of 114), nine city vice mayors (out of 114), 182 city councilors, 225 municipal mayors (out of 1,493), 144 municipal vice mayors and 1,731 councilors, 5,350 punong barangays (out of 41,917), 64,142 sanggunian barangays, and 18,794 sanggunian kabataan chairpersons” (Hega, 2003: 8).

While these gains of women in politics are notable, the gender question in the Philippines is still characterized by sharp contradictions. There is a “mirage of women empowerment” since macho culture in the society and in many institutions and organizations persist. The labor market is not an exception since it is a “roller coaster” for many workingwomen. Their employment did not mean security, decency at work, while the gender divide and “glass ceiling” continue to exist in many workplaces.

The labor force participation of women (LFR) was at 49% in 1996 and by October 2001 working women has peaked at 52.8% only to decline to 51.8% in July this year (*vis-à-vis* 83.1% for men). By July 2003, women constituted 13.1-million of the 34.2 million labor force and around 1.8-million are without

work as compared to the 2.4-million unemployed men though Chart 1 shows that historically women have had higher unemployment rates.

Chart 1: Unemployment Rates of Men and Women (1996-2002)



Source of Chart: National Statistics Coordination Board Fact Sheet 1-2003

In the latest available sex-disaggregated figures (Table 2), it further illustrates the role of women in the economy. They have established their presence as labor and unskilled workers thus underscoring the visual representation of women as workers in labor-intensive routine assembly line work. In terms of industry, the social skills of women are of course demanded in wholesale and retail trade where thousands of women are employed as “perpetual contractual” with 5-month cycle.

Table 2: Presence of Women Workers by Occupation Group and Industry (April 2002)

Category	Number of Women	Percentage of Women
By Occupation Group		
Laborers and Unskilled Workers	4.2-million	35.4%
Officials of government and special interest organizations, corporate executives, managers, managing proprietors and supervisors	1.9-million	16.1%
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	1.4-million	11.5%
Farmers, forestry workers and fishermen	1.1-million	9.2%
By Major Industry Group		
Wholesale and retail trade	3.5-million	29.1%
Agriculture, hunting and forestry	3.0-million	24.8%

Source: Bureau of Women and Young Workers Website

Another angle of dissecting the role of women is its share in the various classes of workers. Among the wage and salary workers, women comprise 5.6-million or 38.2% while 4-million or 35.2% of them are own-account workers or self-employed/entrepreneurs. Lastly, 2.1-million (52.2%) of the employed women are unpaid family workers demonstrating a big segment of informal employment and reflective of what this category is all about – unpaid. The labor market status of women is further described by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) when it revealed that “...there were more women than men in October 2001 among the

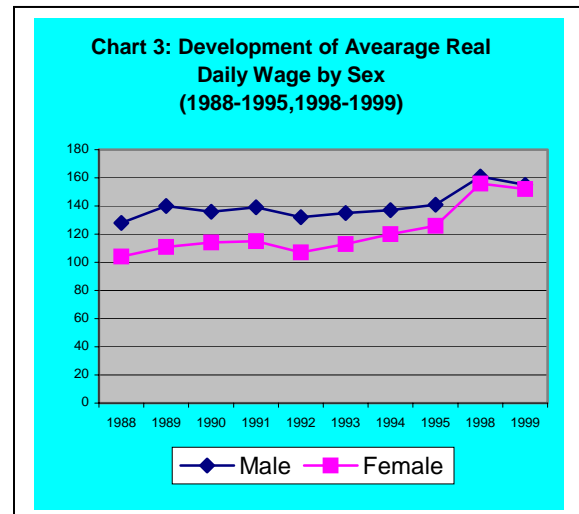
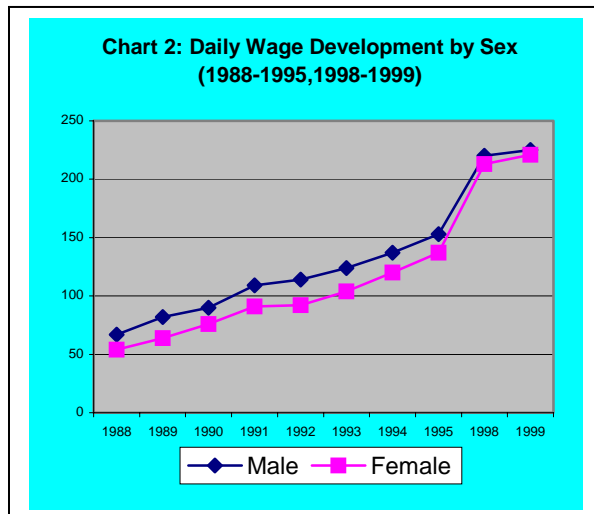
professionals (68.5%), clerks (66.7%), officials of government and special-interest organizations, corporate executives, managers, managing proprietors and supervisors (58.1%), and service workers and shop and market sales workers (54.3%). Men, on the other hand, were mostly plant and machine operators and assemblers (92.0%), in farming, forestry and fishing occupations (83.4%) and in trades (71.7%)”(NCRFW, 2003). Furthermore, it is also instructive to present the disaggregated data of several industries and qualify the scope of the decision-making role of women in their workplaces.

Table 2: Number and Percentage of Women Managers and Executives by Industry (1998)

Industry	Number of Women Managers and Executives	Percentage vis-à-vis Men
Agriculture and Forestry	1,247	21.7
Fishery	202	19.9
Manufacturing	30,472	35.3
Electricity, Gas and Water	1,768	25.3
Construction	1,388	19.5
Mining and Quarrying	89	10.5
Wholesale and Retail	16,369	39.5
Transportation, Communication and Storage	5,216	35.8
Financing, Intermediation Establishments	27,603	50.3
Hotels and Restaurants	7,775	55.1
Real Estate, renting and Other Business Activities	6,461	40.1
Private Education Services	8,286	60.3
Health and Social Work	1,961	59.8
Other Community, social, and Personal Services	1,878	40.9

Source: National Statistics Office, 1998 Data

In terms of women’s share in income, the picture is also bleak. The National Women Plan showed that as of 1993 for every 1 peso earned by a male agricultural worker, a female gets 0.358, 0.371 in wholesale and retail, 0.394 in manufacturing, 0.461 in finance, insurance and business service, and 0.433 in community, social and personal services. By occupation, sales workers get only 0.355 pesos, production workers have 0.406 pesos, and for professional and technical workers a measly 0.461 pesos. This is a clear violation of the “equal work for equal pay” principle. The charts below illustrates how women are closing the income divide in terms of nominal daily wage (Chart 2) and average real wage (Chart 3).



Source: LEARN Wage Database Project Report (2003)

In terms of unionism, the gender divide is also wide. The 2002 General Survey of Labor Organizations by the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics showed that in a survey covering 1-million unionists under 92 organizations, women constitute merely 17.9% of membership. Though 40% of the sample did not indicate their sex, splitting the 40% will give women membership 37%. This somehow validates the older data cited by the NCRFW which revealed that as of the year 2000 34.2% of trade union members are women with 74.6% coming from the private sector and 26.4% from the public sector. It also stated that union leadership among women is only at 25.6%. The 4th Philippine Periodic Report to UN-CEDAW even described women unionists as elected or appointed normally as “board members, secretaries, treasurers and auditors - positions that may be regarded as extensions of their mother/housewife roles. Women's relegation to lower positions in the unions reflects to some extent their socialization as men's subordinates. Other barriers to their equal participation include lack of time (because of their multiple roles as mother, wife and worker), lack of support (the trade union culture being male-oriented) and less access to training and education. These constraints in effect deny women's fair representation in both policy-making and decision-making in trade unions” (CEDAW, 1996:55).

This overview gives us the mixed status of women politics and in the labor market. It also provided us the struggles of women with trade unions and communities. This is the environment in which many women have taken steps to create or join women organizations that would represent their interests, protect their rights, and harness their potentials as contributors in workplace and societal change. This is where MAKALAYA found its rationale to exist.

Some Conceptual Considerations

The traditional conception of industrial relations focuses on the interaction of the trade unions, the employers, and the government. Workers, basically the wage earners in regular employment, are represented by trade unions and they influence the terms and conditions of employment primarily through collective bargaining. But the current labor market realities have overhauled this traditional three party model. Small union and bargaining density in the Philippines and the rapidly increasing number of contingent or contractual workers has reduced the efficacy of unions as vehicle for representation. In many cases, workers in irregular employment are organized as either community organization or as an organization of mutual assistance without the capacity of formal collective bargaining. This is facilitated by the fact that they are working either as individuals, as micro enterprise, or form part of a complex web of contractors.

The abovementioned facts created a duality in the labor market. There are those covered or can be potentially covered by unions and collective bargaining on one hand and those who work in a setting where the employment relationship is not fully defined or fall under legal categorizations on the other. The former has institutionalized representation while the later operates in a collage of integration in government promotional programs, NGO work, or through multi-objective community or occupational associations. The unions have a captured constituency as bargaining agents in a firm while the community and occupational associations have to struggle to maintain membership in a very mobile job market. For the purpose of this paper, this dichotomy can be labeled as *trade unionism* and *community unionism*. Both categories reiterate the fact that workers aim for representation through collectivity and solidarity.

This is the backdrop and the imperatives in which MAKALAYA operates. Cognizant of these factors, it now works with a broad aggrupation in the labor movement that is integrating the 2 unionism into the so-called “social movement unionism”. One of the members of this grouping describes it as “a strategy that calls for a broader solidarity among all types of workers – those working in the public and private sectors, blue and white collar, formal and informal sector, domestic and overseas, unemployed and self-employed. A strategy that would enable the labor movement to mobilize the working people and challenge our enemies in different arenas of struggle. A struggle that would emphasize the social

character of the labor movement – from its composition to its calls” (APL-LEARN, 200: 64). It is a labor movement project beyond collective bargaining which Añonuevo (2003) summed-up as “if trade unionism is equals to wage earners, social movement unionism is equals to labor force”. This reiterates the imperative of inclusive representation and broad mobilization as well as the need to expand the movement’s constituency and convert it into a strong labor market and political force.

The partnership of firm-based and community-based workers also underscores the wider political-economic factors that affect their employment. Brecher and Costello [eds.] (1990) argued that an alliance between unions and community groups potentially “represents a new majority which is today excluded from political and economic decision- making but which if mobilized would represent an enormous social force” (p.10). Tufts (1996), for his part, concluded that community unionism is both a product of, and reaction to, the failure of traditional unionism to “resist the increasing demands being placed by capital on their lives and communities” (p.10). Jones (2003) summarized the new model of unionism as a project that

also incorporated a two-way, mutually beneficial interaction between the traditional industrial parties and diverse community groups, within the economic, political, legal and social/culture in which they exist..... The model recognised that there were major challenges for all parties as the structural boundaries between them became less relevant, and concluded that parties could no longer come together for intense campaigns and then retreat to their original independence (p.13).

All this re-conception of unionism is the backdrop for the gender issues that has formed part of the women’s struggle for many years. The situation in the trade unions was similar to what Heery (1998) described in her UK study wherein she lamented, “many changes are modest and are vulnerable to the charge of tokenism” (p.357). At the same time, the situation outside the workplaces and unions is not much better as patriarchy and macho culture pervades within families and communities. Thus, the formation of MAKALAYA is one of the responses to this reality. It is also an outcome of this rethinking as well as of the need to pursue the initial gains of women as workers, as leaders, and as citizens.

MAKALAYA Herstory: An Unfolding Project

MAKALAYA was built from the collective intertwining of lives of women workers from the different parts of the country. Women leaders of MAKALAYA were involved in different organizations even before MAKALAYA was established. Some have rooted their awakenings from the activism during the Marcos dictatorship. Some have deepened their commitment for societal transformation due to experiences in trade union work and involvement in community organizing.

In 1988, a core of women trade unionists involved in organizing and education work in their respective unions started discussing their own problems and difficulties as activists in a male-dominated trade union movement. They also discussed experiences and tactics on how to entice women to be more active in union work. Recognizing the power of education as an organizing tool, they designed a module on gender awareness, with the aim in view of organizing women to take active roles in the unions. This proved to be effective as women graduates of the gender awareness seminars conducted with the support of the Gender Program of the Labor Education and Research Network (LEARN) realized that a venue to discuss women issues should be provided aside from simply attending education courses. It was then that Women Workers Forum, a loose organization of attendees of courses on women workers was established. The Forum met twice a year to discuss pressing issues of women in different workplaces for the period 1990-1994 through symposia and cultural activities.

During those years, discussions always revolved on problems encountered in integrating women concerns in the trade union agenda and policies as well as national issues affecting women workers. With this, women realized that a new strategy on challenging the trade union movement to be more responsive

to women issues and concerns is needed. In 1995, Women Workers Forum was renamed MAKALAYA and after three years of consultation with women leaders from organizations who benefited from the gender seminars, MAKALAYA was formally established in March of 1998 by women trade unionists, community leaders and women working in informal work arrangements.

The organizational principles of MAKALAYA are anchored on the need to:

1. provide for equality of women and men in the economic, political and socio-cultural structures – in all spheres of life
2. recognize and respect the distinctions between women and men
3. create alternative structures where women and men can develop their full potentials as human beings
4. develop simultaneous initiatives in responding to gender and class issues

MAKALAYA believes that redefining concepts of power and politics are necessary in outlining the strategy for empowerment. It posits that power and politics should not be limited to the understanding of the engagement in public sphere. This means that “for women, politics consists of determining lives; therefore, making decisions both in the public and private spheres. Moreover, it means making the links between these spheres, based on an understanding that the personal is political and vice versa. Women’s politics means managing and changing conditions in the political and economic structures, including power relations therein, and defining issues of one in relation to the structural issues” (MAKALAYA, 2000: 2-3)

MAKALAYA’s character is still unfolding. It is a parallel women-only organization independent of the union structure, which supports and enhances the agenda for women empowerment. It was born out of the need to organize unity beyond the federation and labor center structures as well as beyond formal labor. It was founded to respond to the felt need of the women workers that the struggle for empowerment in the trade unions couldn’t be confined within the existing trade union structures. It also exists to operationalize the working people-social movement unionism concept (as opposed to the traditional view that unionism is only for the wage earners and unions exist only for representation and bargaining).

The network is trying to mix two “perspectives” in the organization – trade unionism and community organizing/unionism. This is based on the premise that the consciousness of the “working class” should be imbibed on both formal and informal workers. Trade unions’ concerns have always been for workers who have clear employer-employee relationship. Yet, nowadays, it is not viable to organize workers without seriously looking at workers in the informal economy. These workers have grown enormously and still growing. Their work cannot be seen separate from the total economic system.

It recognizes the difficulties of integrating women and gender issues within the trade union and community structures hence the need to apply non-traditional strategies that will focus on women’s personal and organizational needs and concerns with the end in view of integrating gender into the broad labor movement. It is therefore a pressure group within and outside of the trade union movement and the communities.

MAKALAYA’s membership is composed of individuals who are organized and educated to develop their potentials as leaders. There are 5,514 members spread out in 9 provinces of the country. It mobilizes and advocates as a network of various women organizations for gender equality, social justice, and women empowerment. More so, it provides direction and support system as well as establishes sisterhood among women workers.

With its social movement character, it establishes and maintains links not only with the labor movement but to the women's, human rights as well as other progressive movements for societal transformation. Majority of its members also joined the party list AKBAYAN Citizen's Action Party.

MAKALAYA's organizing strategy has two components: vertical organizing or "sectoral" organizing and horizontal organizing or community organizing. Vertical organizing pertains to categorizing members based on the work they do. The main purpose of this is to define the women workers role and agenda for different workplaces. It covers the inclusion of women issues in collective bargaining, establishment of women committees, identification of campaign issues like sexual harassment, and the development of their leadership capabilities in union administration and negotiation. The informal sector women also employ this strategy since it covers specific occupational groups like street vendors and community care-givers. This is their form of collective representation vis-à-vis the local government.

Horizontal organizing on the other hand is a geographical grouping of its members regardless of individual classification as worker. The idea of horizontal organizing is for our members to actively take part on community issues and to develop their sisterhood. Horizontal organizing also helps surface workers' problems that are not traditionally being taken up by the unions. For community organizations, some take the form of direct MAKALAYA chapter organizing while others are recruited individually and facilitate the networking with MAKALAYA. The issues covered, aside from employment issues, are those related to social services, housing problems and other related problems that should be addressed to local and national governments.

Its education strategy, on the other hand, deals with the acquisition and enhancement of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will lead to women's awareness, organizing and action towards empowerment. Courses include strengthening the ability of women workers to organize and improve their living and working conditions, enhancing the capacity of women workers to represent and defend their interests in various workers' organizations and building the confidence of women workers to defend their rights. Self-development is given importance. It is anchored on the understanding that self-empowerment is a crucial element of the collective empowerment of women. In terms of education contents, the courses, as described in MAKALAYA brochure are divided into two types of programs, namely:

- a. Women Empowerment Training (WET) focuses on personal enhancement and effective training to develop women as whole and integrated persons. This program serves as entry point in women awareness through focusing on improving their personal competencies instead of immediate political orientation on women issues. However, the end of each program allocates a session to discuss MAKALAYA as an organization where they can actively participate as women, thus serving as a recruitment ground for women organizations and mobilizations.
- b. Women Intensive Labor Development (WILD) workshops and conferences that focus on political, organizational and advocacy involvement of women.

As substance is important in education work so are types and methods of learning. Considering that women especially those with family responsibilities are having difficulties attending live-in seminars, MAKALAYA uses methods like study circle, symposia and one-on-one, thereby adapting to the needs and availabilities of women. As much as possible, the network brings education to members.

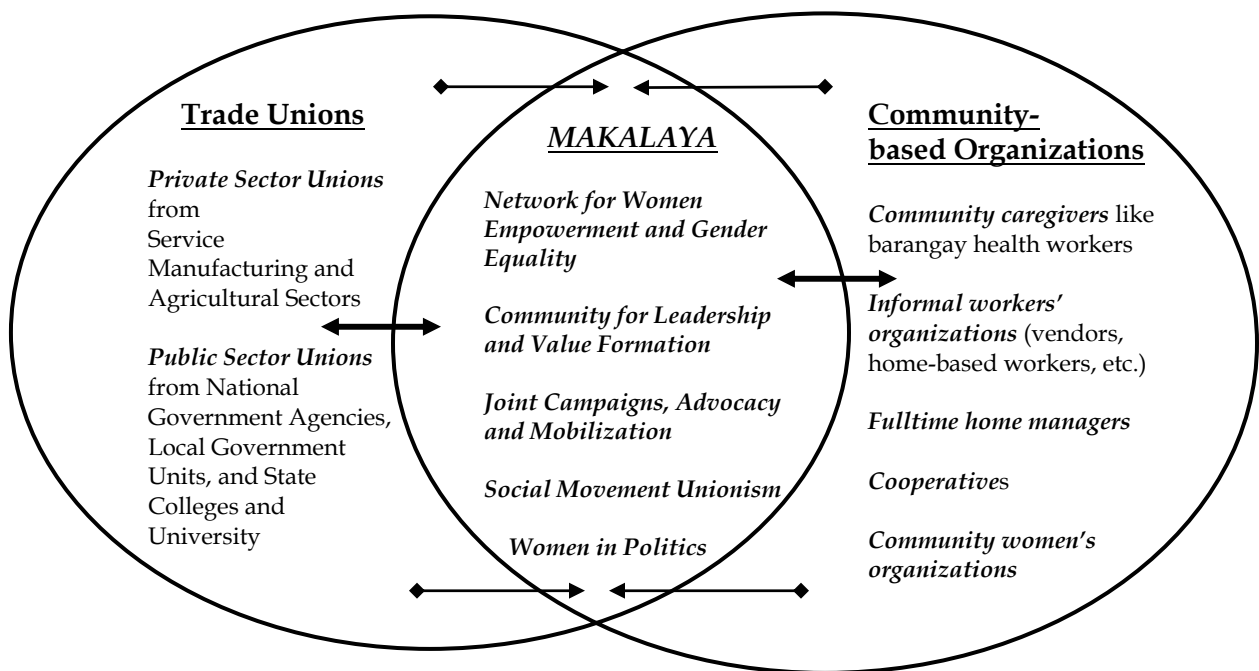
MAKALAYA is a network in itself as it embraces different types of workers. Considering the long-term objectives of MAKALAYA, it has no illusion that it can achieve them on its own. It coordinates with other networks locally and internationally for exchange of information, issues, strategies and experiences on labor, gender and other related issues while remaining an autonomous organization.

Its work in advocacy and campaign aims toward integrating women workers issues at different levels: workplace, community, local government units and national policies and laws.

MAKALAYA’s Confluence and Contradictions

Confronting the duality in the labor market and integrating agendas and organizations of women from trade unions and communities is a great challenge for the MAKALAYA (Chart 4). However, the imperatives of the context easily create convergence among women from various sectors. The primary common need is to gain women empowerment in their respective organizations. This means, as a first step, developing women leaders with clear-cut perspective on gender issues grounded on competence. This is what MAKALAYA offers – a community to alter the nature of gender relations through their own skills and powers rather than through tokenism due to male guilt or structural concessions. Thus, leadership formation is the bedrock of this sisterhood. It is a strategy of women learning together, working together, and making an impact together.

Chart 4: MAKALAYA Network/Constituencies and Confluence



The community of learning is also practiced as sharing of skills. The exposure of women coming from one sector on certain skills opens a potential for sharing of competencies among the members. This is called the “twinning program” and one example is the skills transfer on cooperative management from trade unionists to community women who are organizing livelihood projects.

The creation of the network is also a result of the shared goals due to the fact that the members face the same issues and challenges. This makes MAKALAYA an advocacy group that analyzes issues, formulate responses and proposals, and mobilize women to create change within organizations, in workplaces, and in government policies. The campaigns and promotional activities covered include women’s rights, sexual harassment, reproductive health, domestic violence, AWIR (abuse of women in intimate relationship), access to Gender and Development (GAD) budget of government agencies, and even the gender dimension of labor laws and standards. These concerns underscore the fact that women, whether from formal or informal employment, face the same set of problems as women, as workers and as citizens. Its members are young and old, single, married, single parent, separated, widow, legal wife or

common law wife, mothers and not, urban and rural, Christians, Muslims and indigenous peoples and even literate and illiterate. It is sisterhood in diversity, a community for holistic change.

Thus, social movement unionism is the key framework that sustains the organization. This concept fuses the various needs women from various employment settings. On another plane, this emphasizes the need for solidarity among all types of workers whether male or female in altering the negative practices in their working lives. While gender struggle is being pursued, each member also understands that they form part of a broader movement pushing for change beyond the confines of gender and employment relationship.

Finally, the convergence of MAKALAYA women and their organizations also extends towards the political sphere. Policy advocacy creates an imperative for political action and even electoral participation. It is on this rationale that many members of the network contribute in creating an alternative political party called AKBAYAN. This involves the application of women quota in party structures, creation of a party women's committee, development of women politicians and party activists, as well as the formulation of a gender fair party program and legislative agenda. In this case, the confluence of women workers is found in the practice of "women in politics".

But women's solidarity as trade unionists and community leaders has its own paradoxes. Foremost is the challenge of double membership as double loyalty. The dilemma in recruiting members from the trade unions is that some union leaders take this as an affront to them -- MAKALAYA should not bother itself in organizing the organized. The union, as the primary unit with the women committee as a mere structure within it, should be given priority by its members. Any additional expression outside the union structure but concerns workplace issues is seen as a competitor if not diversion. This puts pressure on some members to becoming active members of MAKALAYA.

This is aggravated by the fact that once MAKALAYA has developed "unknown" women for leadership position they assume greater responsibilities in the unions. As a result, these women have less time for the development of women committees or even to perform assigned tasks in MAKALAYA. The women's ascent to position of power is a good indicator of success for mainstreaming women and gender but some sort of double burden occurs and most of the time at the expense of women concerns.

Related to this is the reinforcement of the gender divide. Oftentimes women committees are not given due recognition compared to other standing committees in the union. Their issues are considered "women thing" thus only the women should discuss them. This is also a clear reflection of the situation where gender is not a priority issue of the trade unions. The prevailing trade union culture makes it very difficult to integrate women and gender issues. There are many experiences where women issues are even used as "disposable issue" in the collective bargaining process.

Another dilemma that is unfolding is in the composition of its membership. In the beginning, majority of its members are women trade unionists who are at the forefront of integrating women and gender concerns in the agenda of the trade unions either as leaders and members of the various committees such as women, education and organizing or as members of the Executive Board. However, the past few years saw the defeat of some unions relating with MAKALAYA, the closure of many firms, and the increase of contractual workers that cannot become union members. This resulted in a shift in constituency building as the network saw the potential of expansion work focused on women in informal work patterns fighting for their protection as well as community-based women's organizations engaging the local government units to be responsive to gender and development issues. As a result, trade unionists only accounted for 15% of MAKALAYA's total membership by March 2003.

For those workers that move from formal employment to the informal sector, the change of employment arrangement sometimes results in being inactive or at most abandonment of membership. This is facilitated by the absence of community-based organization where these individuals work or reside. Labor mobility is indeed a problem for sustaining memberships and organizations. The network is

actually following the contours of the trade union movement in terms of dwindling union membership and of the labor market in terms of shrinking formal employment. While this is good in terms of extending the collective protection offered by organizations to other sectors, it is a sad manifestation of the fate of many trade union movements around the world.

Unfortunately, market opportunities also reinforce this phenomenon. The issue of sub-contracting has pitted workers against each others. One particular example is on shift of the sales strategy of Coca-Cola. As the union fights to retain their sales force and avoid sub-contracting, MAKALAYA members in the province of Basilan are exploring the possibility of becoming distributors themselves. At this point, the coordination between MAKALAYA and the community organization in that province kept that plan on hold. However, this market prospect will continue to emerge in other sectors and circumstances and the competition of workers might be the regrettable outcome.

Coordination among the various sectors is a practice of solidarity but for MAKALAYA a broader and diverse constituency has its own dangers as well. This puts pressure on the capacity of the organization to service its membership, to administer the programs as well as to create a niche of specialization. MAKALAYA is right in the middle of this organizational challenge. The limitation in financial resources further creates difficulties in implementing the plans at the various levels of the organization. A wide array of expertise will also be needed by the network. Additionally, while trade unionism and community unionism cover the 2 dimensions of the labor market and create convergence, the wherewithal of responding to these challenges pulls the network into various directions. Its capacity to service the diverse needs of network also pushes it to default in some demands of its constituency.

“Assembling the Plane in Flight”

The experiences of MAKALAYA have shown that women in trade unions are still in the process of winning a revolution for gender equality. One can always use the analogy that it is “half-full or half-empty” depending on who looks at it. But the solidarity of trade unionists and community women into a community of learning and mobilization is a battle won. Women overcoming the gender divide and creating a space for women leadership and reforms in the realm of organizations, workplaces, and State institutions is a major step for gender fair society. It’s a long way but in this case the steps are as good as objectives fulfilled. The small gains and the big victories are changing gender relations in the various contexts of the individual members and of the allied organizations. However, there are still questions that remain to be confronted. These include:

- ❖ Is organizing women inside trade unions creating double loyalty and double burden? Are women’s groups capable of creating real autonomy inside the labor movement? Is creating a network of women from various sectors stretching the concept of organizational focus too much? How do we deal with the problem of workers from informal and formal sectors being pitted against each other by the market?
- ❖ Is trade unionism’s expansion to or convergence with community unionism an abandonment of the struggle to give other wage earners the protective shield of collective bargaining? In the Philippines, is it a surrender that 98% of the formally employed can no longer be organize into trade unions? Is it a manifestation of saturation for trade unions?
- ❖ How far can we really integrate men in breaking the gender divide? Is an all-women organization exclusivist and merely reinforcing the divide?

The questions continue to provoke some of the conceptual and organizational obstacles for women in the labor movement. These are basic questions that clarify definitions but at the same time stir up barriers and discrimination. But for MAKALAYA, it will continue to “assemble the plane in flight” for gender equality.

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