
INTERVIEW WITH DR. JENNY LIND ELMACO

珍妮·林德·埃马科博士专访

Dennis P. McCann 丹宁思 Interviews Jenny Lind Elmaco

Dennis Patrick McCann (DPM): *Dr. Jenny Lind Elmaco (JE) was one of the featured speakers at the annual MRI Conference in November 2018. She presented a message of hope for women, focusing on the prospects for women's economic development and social progress in the context of China's Belt and Road Initiative. As a Filipina with significant experience with international NGOs and academic institutions, Dr. Elmaco emphasized the leadership of Filipina women, and the lessons that others might draw from their struggles to achieve economic success. That may be a good place to begin our interview: Dr. Elmaco, can you review your findings with us?*

Jenny Lind Elmaco (JE): I attend the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women meetings every year at the UN Headquarters in New York in order to keep abreast of the issues affecting women and girls in the world. I am proud to say that the Philippines is one of the leaders in women's empowerment. "The Philippines holds the 8th place in the Global Gender Gap report in 2018." The report, released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked 149 countries based on four categories: labour force participation, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. The country is the most gender equal country in Asia. Further, the Thomson

Reuters Foundation (2016) survey of the world's 45 biggest economies found the Philippines was the country where women performed best when considering representation in leadership roles in social enterprises and the gender pay gap. These findings are all the more noteworthy, considering that the Philippines ranks 113th on the UN's Human Development Index for 2018, with a per capita GDP of \$USD 3,104, placing it among "lower middle income countries" in the World Bank's rankings.

DPM: *Such reports create the impression that Filipina women are doing almost as well as women in Scandinavian countries. Is that right?*

JE: Well, not exactly. Certainly, we are happy to note that the Philippines is among only five countries that have achieved full parity in political and economic leadership – meaning we have had women Presidents and have women legislators and as local chief executives. Nevertheless, while the Philippines has the best profile in Asia, we must be careful about the parameters of the Global Gender Gap report, which may measure some economic and social indicators, e.g., education, but does not really go far enough in assessing "human development," as the UN reports provide more detail.

DPM: *So you see certain areas of progress that get highlighted in global comparative statistics, but others are harder to measure.*

JE: Yes, for example, there are other areas such as cybersex, that is, online pornography where young girls are victims, raising an issue of concern that is not reflected in the results of the report. Of course, the focus of the report is on narrowing the gender gap so we understand how the metrics are presented. Yet, I believe issues like this should be in the main discussion.

DPM: *What do you mean by victims in such cases?*

JE: People who are forced to make money by selling themselves online. The International

Justice Mission (IJM) - an anti-trafficking group operating in the Philippines has reported that tens of thousands of girls in the Philippines are estimated to be trapped in the sex trade, with a growing number abused online by a worldwide clientele due to the country's cheap internet, high standard of English and widespread poverty.

DPM: *Is this worse here than in other Asian countries?*

JE: This is considered to be a 'hidden crime', to borrow the words of the Thomson Reuters Foundation in their report, because many victims are silenced by their own families and are afraid to speak out, while the modern technology masks messaging to video call apps which makes criminals tough to track.

Currently, there is no data on the number of child victims of cybersex trafficking, but at least one in 130 are estimated to be trapped in modern-day slavery according to the Global Slavery Index by the Walk Free Foundation.

The message is not only that more needs to be done but also that this will only happen if we get men involved. Here in Dumaguete, I supervised a Spanish-funded project with the Gender Watch Against Violence and Exploitation (GWAVE), a respected local NGO whose goal is to get women out of these situations and empower them to reach their fullest potential. One of their projects was GENTS - Developing Men as Agents against Gender Based Violence and Exploitation - which involves men, proactively and strategically, in the struggle for gender justice. Essentially, the goal is simple as with the #MeToo movement: Make the world safer for women by ensuring that women are free from sexual harassment, abuse, assault, and rape.

DPM: *So the challenge of achieving women's empowerment goals is far deeper than overcoming economic inequalities, or gender pay gap. Can you explain why there is so much emphasis on economic questions, when there are deep cultural questions as well?*

JE: We have to understand the economic

challenge and how it relates to the prospects for cultural transformation. One place to look is at the relative difference between entrepreneurship, where there has been dramatic progress, and what is happening in corporate institutional settings, public and private. Here are some examples of what can happen when women become entrepreneurs:

In 2007, Reese Fernandez-Ruiz founded Rags2Riches (R2R), a social enterprise company that revolutionised women's business practices by empowering the makers of the products who come from impoverished communities. The women artisans receive about 40 percent of the retail price for each item, and have created a cooperative that owns a share of the company. R2R also provides them with training in personal finance, health insurance and nutrition. The value proposition of the company is unique in that it espouses an eco-friendly, ethical fashion brand that provides sustainable employment to artisans in Metro Manila. Every R2R piece is handwoven by artisans using overstock, upcycled and indigenous fabrics that would otherwise end up in a landfill.

Another example is the success of Dalareich Polot, owner of Dalareich Food Products and founder of Ginto Fine Chocolates, a woman-run Filipino company on the island of Bohol in the Philippines. Dalareich Food Products sources its *tableya*, the local name for roasted, grounded and molded nibs of fermented cacao beans, from small farmers in Sierra Bullones and Carmen towns of Bohol province. It participates in several programs to support micro, small and medium enterprises in the Philippines especially those that are run by women. Dalareich's father is a tricycle driver and her mother works as a streetsweeper. The transformation of a business that in 1994 was producing only five kilos of *tableya* in a small hut in Barangay Booy, Tagbilaran City, to now supplying five-star hotels like the Shangri-La's Mactan Resort and Mactan's Cebu International Airport is testament to the returns that come with supporting women's economic empowerment.

DPM: *These are very encouraging stories, but*

how can they become a beacon of hope for women in Asian countries, not just the Philippines?

JE: Asian women everywhere must learn to form women's networks in business and the professions. Filipina women have led the way in organizing such networks. Apart from the inspirational example of individual entrepreneurs, Filipina women have developed support groups and alliances such as the Philippine Women's Economic Network, the Women's Business Council, the Filipina CEO Circle networks operating in Southeast Asia, which provide a favourable environment for female-led enterprises and support for women's entrepreneurship. Another example is AWEN (Asian Women Entrepreneur's Network), an association of business women, founded in 2014 to develop and propose initiatives to promote economic and trade activities, in order to enhance gender equality, empower and strengthen entrepreneurship skills for women within the

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A program that has the potential to be replicated throughout Asia is the GREAT Women (Gender Responsive Economic Actions for the Transformation of Women) Project

of the Philippine government, headed by the Philippine Commission on Women, which aims to help small-scale women entrepreneurs in the food, textile, woven cloth, and home-style decor industries by linking them with Filipino entrepreneurs who are able to provide assistance to refine their business ideas. The project has enrolled 3,652 women micro-entrepreneurs into the program and has facilitated various trade fairs, caravans and exhibits. GREAT also gives the beneficiaries access to finances and helps locate the right markets – both domestic and global – for their products. One of the strengths of the project is its partnership with national government agencies such as the Department of Trade and Industry and local government units such as cities and municipalities to create and implement policies, programs, services and initiatives that will encourage and assist women to start and grow their microenterprises.

The Philippines' Republic Act 9710, the "Magna Carta of Women" (2010), provides the necessary mechanisms to enforce and guarantee the realisation of women's rights with a wide variety of legislative, executive, administrative and other regulatory instruments, policies and practices aimed at accelerating the equal participation of women in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. One major lesson that can be learned from the Philippines' experience is that it takes not only individual initiative and social networking, but also government mandates to transform the economy so that it will improve the lives of all people, women as well as men.

DPM: *A mandated 5% of the budget for any government program, if I understand you correctly, must be reserved for a "Gender and Development" (GAD) plan. How does that work?*

JE: The GAD budget plan is mandated to address "gender issues". To understand the range of concerns that might be covered in this plan, we must remind ourselves about the significance of gender issues, and the consequences of failing to address them. Such issues surface in almost any government program, where the challenge of inclusivity has not been fully addressed in the

design of the program. For example, GAD ought to have an impact on disaster relief programs designed to address the needs of the poor. In such programs, "gender issue" means addressing the traditional bias favouring "binary" families, that is, families with both father and mother present, and excluding non-traditional family groups, such as single parent households, LGBTQ families, etc.

In the aftermath of Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan), in 2013, we discovered that the relief program for Tacloban, hardest hit by the typhoon, did target aid to families, but that all the families listed for aid were "binary" families, which left out those that did not fit the binary profile. The non-traditional families, for example, single parent households, or where both parents were of the same sex, could not qualify for assistance. The full implementation of the GAD plan would address and seek to abolish forms of discrimination wittingly or unwittingly based on gender biases. Program designers must also be aware of intersectionality, as in the case of poverty compounding the effects of gender and other forms of discrimination.

DPM: *Understanding intersectionality highlights the fact that poverty, as well as other forms of deprivation, creates greater obstacles to self-realisation on gender issues. This has to do with program design: if you have faulty or archaic assumptions about the people who shall be served, it can contribute to exclusion from services, for example, for nontraditional families.*

JE: Exactly. Failing to address the issue of gender development, we end up leaving out the needs of nontraditional families. Awareness of the problem must become mandatory for policy makers, research designers, etc. The Philippine Commission on Women has resources for fulfilling this mandate, along with NEDA (the government's Department of Management and Budget). The tools for self-assessment are available, so that planning at all levels can be inclusive: we need harmonized Gender Development Guidelines, for projects that are not part of GAD (and its 5% budgetary mandate).

DPM: *So far, then, we've discussed the big picture: women's empowerment through entrepreneurship, social networking, and government support, as part of a general commitment to a socially progressive national development scheme. But your work now is not in government or public policy administration, but as facilitator of partnerships and other outreach activities on behalf of Silliman University, where you also must fulfill a faculty member's normal duties of caring for students and promoting the common good of an academic community. Is there any conflict or tension between your responsibilities in the university and your broad aspirations for women's empowerment?*

Elmaco: We need a mandatory Gender Development Course, for all students and staff, to educate them to the problems of bullying in all its forms, and related issues; or perhaps, a gender responsiveness course.

JE: Here at Silliman University (SU), we have women in positions of authority, starting with the President; but right now we have to make sure that the whole university is gender-responsive. The University should be considered a safe space where you can identify, express yourself as you believe you are, and not suffer discrimination because of it.

DPM: *How would you make that happen?*

JE: For example, when you are in your child-bearing years, your fertility is often considered a liability, a cost to your employer based on the assumption that you will be having more children, which can be a deterrent to hiring and promotion. We lack a recognition that child-bearing is a part of life, rather than a liability.

DPM: *I've seen this already in some business corporations, but I'd hoped universities would be more enlightened about it. A related issue: in hiring decisions, is it permissible to ask a candidate about her plans for having children: "Do you plan to have more children?" Does SU have a policy on that?*

JE: Let us start with human resource management (HR): what are the policies? What questions do they ask of prospective employees? What is the list of benefits on maternity leave and appropriate support systems?

DPM: *If you have a maternity leave policy, then wouldn't you also adopt parental leave policies that were inclusive of males?*

JE: Yes. Our understanding of parenting should not be limited to Mom and Dad, but also should include *Lolo* and *Lola* (grandparents and other care givers). We need a more expansive view of parenting that includes recognizing non-traditional family types.

Here at SU, a big problem is sexual harassment especially for students who do not fit the "binary" pattern, that is, inherited norms of male and female identity, as if gender were an either/or. I recall that even as a student we knew of friends who had been raped, but whose concerns were ignored, with the excuse: "Oh, you're gay; you must have been asking for it."

DPM: *Who would be saying things like that? It is one thing when ignorant peers (students) are indifferent to harassment, another thing, when people doing counseling for example are unresponsive.*

JE: But the problem is that such students (victims) would not go for counseling.

DPM: *So it seems we still have a major challenge of trying to educate, not only students, but also faculty and staff.*

JE: We need a mandatory Gender Development Course, for all students and staff, to educate them

to the problems of bullying in all its forms, and related issues; or perhaps, a gender responsiveness course. Here at Silliman, as we are becoming very international and pluralistic, we must learn to be accepting of others and with no tolerance for sexual harassment.

DPM: *Correct me if I'm wrong, but the bulk of the problem of sexual harassment today is peer to peer. The faculty predators have pretty much been weeded out.*

JE: Yes. Still, we have to have gender sensitivity classes continuously, especially for teachers and mentors. It is important that we know the issues as well.

DPM: *What are the procedures at SU for making a sexual harassment complaint? Do you go to your departmental chair, or where?*

JE: The manual stipulates a process culminating in a disciplinary committee hearing, but from what the students tell me that doesn't reach very far. Students talk to those they are comfortable with, and not with the designated committee.

While the guidance counsellors are certified to handle sexual harassment cases, students don't want the stigma of going to them, etc. We have to change the culture so that students and anyone else who may have been harassed are comfortable with the process of reporting, investigating, and deterring such incidents. This requires taking the campus community to a new level of mutual trust, as well as addressing issues on the part of administrators about privacy and confidentiality, maintaining and enhancing professionalism especially in the way we use information.

The challenges are also long-term, subtle, and involve cultural transformation. For example, it is important to develop a gender inclusive language. We need participatory approaches to creating an inclusive environment on campus. I am happy to note that the Silliman community gets involved in these discussions and planning. We hope to crystallize more efforts.

DPM: *You have given us much to think about regarding how social programs are designed, and how progress through them might be measured. But, given your new responsibilities at Silliman University, you have gone beyond public policy, to the concrete struggles of women and men in an academic community, as they seek to overcome a host of interrelated problems concerning gender and our common humanity. If public policy is the "macro" level, then surely your work at Silliman University opens up the "meso" and "micro" levels of response, as well. Part of the message you have given us, Jenny, is an awareness of how and why women in the Philippines can become the teachers of reality for all Asian women and men. We are in your debt.*



DR. JENNY LIND ELMACO, Secretary General, Association for Christian Universities and Colleges in Asia and Director for Strategic Partnerships, Silliman University, Dumaguete City, Philippines