

# **The State of the Women of Mindanao Report 2004 Executive Summary**

## **The Mindanao Commission on Women**

This year's report emphasizes socio-economic indicators which show the dismal performance of Mindanao in the pursuit of economic progress. The impact of inadequate, inappropriate, and misdirected policy is seen in the realities of war and poverty that characterize many communities in the island. The resulting quality of life and general lack of opportunities take its toll on women because of the multiple roles they play to keep family and community together. Mindanao women urgently need attention in the areas of economic opportunities, reproductive health, political participation, education, and basic services such as water and power.

This report also focuses on the particular situations faced by Moro and Lumad women who are barely visible in government statistics and policy papers.

### **Highlights of the 2004 Report**

#### **1. Women and Population**

##### *1.1 Mindanao's population is growing faster than the national average.*

Mindanao's annual population growth is 2.42 percent, exceeding the national average of 2.36 percent (NCSO 2000). If this growth rate remains constant, it will take 28.5 years for the island's population to double to 32.4 million. Twenty-three percent of Mindanao households experienced hunger between May and July 2004. Moreover, 41.8 percent of Mindanao families are poor. The dependency ratio is very high at seventy-five percent, implying the strain on the family to allocate resources for the care and upkeep of the very young and the very old. The slow economic expansion and the current fiscal crisis accompany the decline in investments in human and social capital. The coping capacities of women are put under greater stress as they struggle to meet their family's basic needs.

*1.2 Mindanao has a culturally diverse population.*

Islamized tribal groups make up twenty percent of the island's population in 2000. They are the dominant ethnic group in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The Indigenous Peoples (IPs) or Lumads, on the other hand, comprise six percent of Mindanao population, and they are mostly found in Regions X and XI and Caraga Region.

*1.3 Poverty is most severe in the provinces where the Muslims and Lumads reside.*

Mindanao contributes thirty-one percent to total poverty in the country. It is most felt in Caraga Region, where the Lumads make up sixty percent of the population.

All provinces in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao posted very low Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>1</sup> values (UNDP 2004). The highest HDI value was posted in Misamis Oriental at 0.665, with the ARMM posting the lowest HDI values ranging from 0.322 to 0.400.

The Gender Development Index (GDI) which measures the inequality between men and women based on life expectancy at birth, educational attainment, and standard of living is also found to be at low values in Mindanao, with an average of 0.449. The highest GDI was posted by Misamis Oriental (0.617), while Sulu (0.322) had the lowest GDI in the entire country.

*1.4 Rural areas with predominantly Muslim population are increasingly being depopulated.*

Due to worsening poverty and the conflict situation, outward migration of rural inhabitants in these areas continues. Banditry, feuds (*rido*), cattle rustling, the unresolved Moro rebellion, and the continuing decline of agriculture and homegrown industries have forced many Moro families to leave their hometowns and look for other means of sustenance in more peaceful towns and cities.

*1.5 As traditional sources of livelihood diminish and traditional tribal territories shrink, indigenous peoples disperse, leading to the demise of their culture and clan solidarity.*

As lands (or reef territories, as in the case of the minority tribes of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi) are taken over by outsiders and business interests, the Lumads of Mindanao are uprooted from their traditional lifestyles

and are forced to evacuate into the towns or city slums where they become alienated from their long-held traditions. Family cohesiveness and clan solidarity fade away, replaced by a survivalist culture. In some cases, young Lumads have become domestic helpers, or even prostitutes. Sama Dilaut (Bajau) families have become itinerant highway beggars.

*1.6 Basic services are dismally lacking in Lumad communities.*

Because they are not part of mainstream society, the Lumads have often been overlooked as a constituency in dire need of social services. Canoy and Suminguit (2001) assert that this poor delivery of basic social services could be a consequence of, and at the same time a contributing factor to, their social exclusion. The neglect has contributed to their impoverishment, which in turn has heightened their exclusion and marginalization.

*1.7 Moro and Lumad women are minorities within minorities.*

Within Mindanao's multi-ethnic population, women occupy low status within their respective ethnic communities and across these ethnic divides. Being minorities, the Lumad and Moro women become doubly disadvantaged compared with their other Mindanawon sisters. Parentally arranged early marriages and the belief that women should stay home and not actively participate in community life limit their chances to improve their knowledge and skills for economic independence. Male chauvinism and discrimination limit their chances in the various spheres of life – be it in employment, public life, government bureaucracy, or social movements.

## 2. Women and Health and Reproductive Rights

*2.1 Public delivery of health services in Mindanao is in a dismal state, with Moro and Lumad communities the most poorly served.*

The health situation in Mindanao needs much improvement to catch up with the rest of the country. The ratio of hospital beds to population in the region is at 1:5,429, a far cry from the ideal 1:500. The ratio of doctors and nurses to population is the worst in Region XI, Region XII, ARMM and Caraga, way behind the ideal 1:20,000. In the year 2002, all these regions suffered increases in maternal deaths (associated with pregnancy, labor and puerpal sepsis) and infant mortality rates. ARMM

posted the lowest life expectancy and high levels of infant and maternal mortality, which are principal outcomes of poverty and official neglect.

The interior areas, notably Lumad and Moro areas are seldom serviced by public health personnel. Among Lumad communities, women healers provide childbirth assistance and treatment of diseases, while family planning is conducted through the use of indigenous herbal contraceptives.

*2.2 Safe drinking water remains an unmet need in many upland communities in Mindanao and in the remote islands of the ARMM.*

As of 2001, Region XII (fifty nine percent) and ARMM (fifty four percent) have the lowest proportion of households with access to potable water. About twenty percent of Mindanao households still rely on spring, lake, river, and rain and eleven percent on dug well. The absence of safe potable water has resulted in a high incidence of disease and a negative impact on family health (Francis 2003). This further burdens women on whose shoulders rest family care responsibilities and negatively affects their health and income-earning capacities.

*2.3 Mindanao's performance in family planning is dismal.*

The contraceptive prevalence rate in 2002 was only forty seven percent, a negligible increase of 1.6 percent from 45.4 percent in 2000 (Sanchez & Ingenta 2003). Women who would like to limit or space their children do not have the means to do so since many health centers are found dismally lacking in family planning information and services. Supplies and equipment are either not available or accessible. Withholding or withdrawing financial support for agencies carrying out programs promoting reproductive health and the general shift of the country towards conservatism in family planning only exacerbate the many burdens of women.

*2.4 War, minority status, and lack of education curtail women's access to health services and limit their reproductive choices.*

The lack of peace and order as well as the continued government neglect make access to basic health services difficult, if not impossible, for many Moro and Lumad women of Mindanao. Early marriages resulting from parentally arranged betrothal and the belief that family planning is against the teachings of God likewise have important effects on sexuality and fertility. These are further compounded by women's lack of education, and consequently, lack of opportunities to work outside the home.

### 3. Women, Education and Literacy

*3.1 Mindanao performs poorest in education indicators with ARMM decidedly the worst case.*

Extreme poverty, aggravated by the worsening peace and order situation, has deprived many Lumad and Moro women of basic education. Overall, Mindanao performs poorest in simple and functional literacy and participation rates compared with Luzon and Visayas, and has the highest dropout rates. Mindanao students also exhibit the worst average performance in the National Secondary Assessment Test, aggravated by a substandard quality of teachers, as indicated by their poor performance in the Licensure tests. Comparatively, ARMM shows the most disturbing performance—highest in dropouts and lowest in simple literacy, functional literacy, secondary participation, and elementary cohort survival. ARMM also has the lowest number of passers for Licensure Exams for Teachers.

*3.2 A huge gap remains in terms of meeting Mindanao's public school requirements.*

Problems related to lack of teachers, classrooms, desk and armchairs, and textbooks cannot be understated. A 2002 report shows that as of SY 2001-2002 alone, public elementary schools needed the following: 11,152 teachers; 16,079 million textbooks; 12,758 classrooms; and 969,337 desks and armchairs while the public secondary schools also needed: 5,736 teachers; 964,640 textbooks; 14,422 classrooms; and 448,423 desks and armchairs. It is uncertain whether such huge requirements can be met considering the ever dwindling budget allocation of Mindanao which compared lowest against the shares of Luzon and Visayas in 2003 (MEDCo 2002).

*3.3 Over time, more girls than boys have improved their performance in education.*

In SY 1999-2000, girls' participation rates in the elementary level improved as shown in their participation rate of 94.1 percent as against boys' 92.5 percent. At the secondary level, girls rated 51.3 percent as against the boys' 45.9 percent. There were also more boy than girl repeaters, both in the public elementary and secondary levels. As to mean test scores for NEAT and NSAT in 1998, the girls gained higher scores (48.9 percent and 43.1 percent, respectively) than the boys (44.8 percent and 40.7 percent, respectively).

*3.4 More women than men pursue higher education but gender segregation by fields of study remains.*

Although women outnumber men in tertiary enrolment and graduation, courses taken up by women and men are evidence of gender segregation or stereotyping. Women are in "soft" courses (accountancy, nursing, midwifery, teaching, computer secretarial, hotel and restaurant management, etc.) while the men are in "hard" courses (engineering, electronics and communications, criminology, law, architecture, town planning, etc.).

*3.5 Gender stereotyping of education limits the choice of women to a few lower paying and less-challenging jobs.*

While there are more women graduates earning their degrees from colleges and universities, males perform better in professional board examinations, according to an ADB report (2003). More males qualify for jobs that offer better pay and higher security.

*3.6 The institutionalization of the madrasah system has enabled Muslim women to enjoy their religious and cultural rights although it has not improved their economic opportunities in the local job market.*

With the recognition and accreditation of Islamic education via the *madrasah*, Moro women have been given greater freedom to exercise their religion and way of life. However, the emphasis on Islamic doctrine and the use of the Arabic language have failed to improve Muslim women (and men's) chances in the mainstream Philippine economy. Moreover, Islamic education has tended to further segregate professionals in the overseas employment market, with Muslims going to Middle Eastern countries and non-Muslims to the U.S. and other countries in the West.

*3.7 Illiteracy remains a major impediment towards the economic uplift of Lumad women in the remote and isolated upland villages in Mindanao.*

Far-flung upland communities lack access to education. This has served to perpetuate poverty and backwardness that victimize Lumad women and men. While literacy and education programs by churches, schools, NGOs and government agencies have benefited and given hope to adult learners and children, there remains an urgent need to institute a comprehensive, replicable, and truly sustainable education program that responds to their culture and economic needs.

#### 4. Labor and Employment

*4.1 There are more males than females in the labor force and there are more males than females who are gainfully employed.*

Women are at a disadvantaged position compared with men as evidenced by a greater number of males than females in the labor force and more males (64.27 percent) than females (35.73 percent) employed. Conversely, there are more females (50.5 percent) than males (14.8 percent) not in the labor force; more females (48.1 percent) than males (41 percent) underemployed; more females (43.38 percent) than males (32.17 percent) who work as laborers & unskilled workers; and more females (56.43 percent) than males (43.57 percent) who work as unpaid family labor (DOLE 2003).

*4.2 Gender segregation in employment continues, contributing to gender disparities and the confinement of women in lower-status and lower-paid occupations.*

Women are continually placed in industries associated with female roles or are extensions of their productive jobs at home. Dominance of women in certain industries and occupation groups such as teaching and health professions, social work, and wholesale and retail trade, points to the reality of gender stereotyping in the job market. Gender inequality is indeed perpetuated as majority of women are assigned to lower-paid and lower-status jobs.

*4.3 Agriculture and wholesale and retail provide more jobs for women.*

Across industry groups, agriculture (37.65 percent) and wholesale & retail trade (28.21 percent) provide more jobs to women. Interestingly, ARMM has more than half (52.2 percent) of its employed population found in agriculture.

*4.4 More women than men are employed in the subsistence sector.*

Women are usually in the subsistence sector as small farmers and backyard cultivators where they work as unpaid family workers and as laborers and unskilled workers.

*4.5 Discrimination cuts down the chances of Moro and Lumad women in the labor market.*

Moro and Lumad women are doubly disadvantaged compared with their Mindanawon sisters by being members of minority groups. Their

skills are too limited for them to be employable. Even as they try to make their way through the tight opportunity structures of mainstream society they remain at the periphery of the labor market (Baguinat et al 2002, Bangoy 1998, Latada 1992). Among Lumad women, a stable source of income is farm labor. Among the Moro populace, women are highly visible in retail trade and food businesses though the bulk of them are still in the agriculture sector. Educated Moro women are usually employed in government offices, in the teaching profession, and in the services sector. Moro women share the same complaint as their male counterparts in that discrimination in employment continues against those with obvious "Muslim family names."

## 5. Rural Women

### 5.1 *Women's contribution to agriculture is invisible.*

Female participation in agriculture is largely as laborers and unskilled farm workers or unpaid family labor. This signifies women's lack of recognition as agricultural workers and their limited absorption into the paid sector.

### 5.2 *Despite women's invaluable contribution to agricultural production, wage structure in agriculture remains unequal.*

Rural women are perennially relegated to the unpaid sector. However, when they do get into the paid sector their daily nominal wages are still lower than men's, with a difference of between PhP14 and PhP27 as of 2002, implying continuing invisibility and undervaluation of female labor and the lack of institutionalization of equal pay in agriculture.

### 5.3 *Women have poorer access to agrarian reform programs and agricultural extension services. Access to and/or control of land, technology and support services substantially remain in the hands of men.*

Out of 221,399 agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) in Mindanao in 2003, only 51,625 or a mere twenty-three percent were women, an indication that women still lack access to land and agricultural resources. About forty-six percent of female ARBs have access to credit services, still much lower than the national average of fifty-six percent.

### 5.4 *Agrarian Reform Cooperatives (ARC) agro-industries have yet to benefit the women as employment opportunities are more available to men than women.*

It is apparent that ARC-led agro-industries continue to marginalize women. Most of the jobs created by the cooperatives rarely make women the beneficiaries. Community projects have continued to stereotype women, placing them in low-skill, low-technology, and unprofitable activities such as sewing, mat-weaving, and basket-making. What this implies is the need for more infrastructure, agricultural services, credit facilities, information, training, and technology directed towards women.

### 5.5 *In the ARB organizations, women generally shy away from leadership and management positions.*

Although it would appear that women and men are equal in terms of occupying key positions within the cooperatives, membership in the board of directors—the highest policy making body—is dominated by males rather than females. The latter are more visible as members of various committees than as directors of the board.

## 6. Overseas Filipino Workers

### 6.1 *Women form the majority of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) from Mindanao.*

In 2002, there were 135,000 Mindanawons who joined the international labor market, the majority (88,020) of whom were women. Most OFWs were at the peak of their productive working age. Region XI contributed the largest number of women to overseas labor while the least came from Caraga Region. The bulk of male OFWs came from Region IX and Region XI. The Middle East and Asia were top favorite destinations of OFWs.

### 6.2 *Unable to compete in the ever-tightening job market, many women opt to take low-status, low-skilled, and often high-risk jobs abroad, which leave them vulnerable to abuse.*

Many migrant workers land in 3Ds (dirty, dangerous, disdained) jobs that require them to work in isolation, thus exposing them to exploitation and abuse. Non-implementation of laws protecting migrant workers often makes these workers defenseless (Cabreza 2003).

### 6.3 *Female deployment overseas results in severe stress on those left behind.*

The departure of the mother-wife and household manager has resulted in the loss of family solidarity. In some Moro households, men, unused to gender roles reversal, become totally dependent on their wife's income. The care of younger children falls on elder children or their grandparents. Where long spouse absence becomes unbearable for the husband, a second wife is often found.

### 6.4 *There has been in recent years an increase in the export of young female migrant labor.*

Due to lack of choices and opportunities within the country, many girls choose to engage in high-risk occupations abroad, including being trafficked in prostitution. Mindanao is the main source of so-called *Japayukis* working as Overseas Performing Artists (OPA) in Japan's clubs and entertainment houses.

### 6.5 *There is an ever-growing number of undocumented OFWs, many of them women.*

Unemployment at home and inhumane working conditions abroad often give OFWs little choice as to whether to stay on or go home to Mindanao a failure. The latter being extremely humiliating, many *Japayukis*, domestic helpers, and factory workers often opt to go undocumented and take chances at irregular jobs that allow them to save money or find some other means of survival (e.g., finding a foreign husband or a kind employer). Being an illegal alien makes migrant workers ineligible for protection and basic health services, so that often they are forced into situations where they have to get into temporary emergency live-in arrangements for the sake of survival.

## 7. Child Labor

### 7.1 *Despite laws against child labor, many children have remained in the labor market.*

Economic difficulties and the inability of parents to provide for the family's welfare have forced many children to join the labor force. In rice and corn fields, banana and sugarcane plantations, quarries, bus stations, and the port area, child labor is visible. Girls usually work as dish washers,

waitresses, vendors, and domestic helpers. Some end up in entertainment clubs and get trafficked into prostitution, either domestically or internationally. Boys are recruited into criminality, including drug pushing, theft, and prostitution. Being minors, children do not enjoy legal protection and work benefits.

### 7.2 *The phenomenon of child labor and child prostitution points to the problem of extreme poverty.*

Abandoning children to their own devices or forcing them to find work that is beyond their physical or mental maturity is a symptom of despair and lack of faith in the educational system and opportunity structures open to the poor. Many parents, unable to support their young, participate in the exploitation of their own children. In spite of advocacy work and child rights campaigns, some parents would rather illegally collaborate with employers and recruiters to get their children to work, rather than have them attend school, which they consider as a useless investment. They are often there when documents have to be falsified or children's ages have to be changed. In extreme cases parents or adult relations push young children into prostitution. This implies a need for a stronger poverty reduction program and a more effective delivery of educational services to the poor.

## 8. Violence against Women & Children

### 8.1 *Despite laws protecting women, sexual violence against women continues.*

Incest rape, sexual harassment, wife battering, and abuse in intimate relationships remain an everyday fact in the lives of women in Mindanao and in remote barangays outside the reaches of the law. Culturally-sanctioned practices such as bride abduction, forced marriage, and payment of bride price that violate women's reproductive rights persist.

### 8.2 *Most perpetrators of violence against women and children are closely related to the victims, most notably their parents (usually the father or stepfather), husbands, live-in partners, boyfriends or relatives.*

Contrary to the notion that rape and physical abuse are inflicted by strangers, the most likely source of violence against women and children are people who are familiar to them, usually family members and intimates. The recent passage of R.A. No. 9262, otherwise known as Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004, is intended to protect women and children from abusive relationships.

*8.3 Trafficking and prostitution continue to be the most insidious, if not most pervasive, form of violence against women and children.*

Because of poverty and government's inability to protect the welfare of its citizens, recruiters and traffickers make of Mindanao's women and young girls, the most tradable goods for sale in the sex market.

*8.4 Because of lack of access to education and lack of economic support from their families, many children remain on the streets, where they learn survival tactics and are introduced into high-risk trades.*

Children whose families do not have the resources to support them end up on the streets where they learn street survival and engage in high-risk behavior which includes rugby sniffing, shoplifting, picking pockets, drug pushing, and unprotected sex. Street life is more risky for girls than boys, as they are the ones who often get raped or sold for sex by their boyfriends, become pregnant, or contract sexually transmitted diseases.

## 9. Women and Armed Conflict

*9.1 Lawlessness and a general situation of conflict beset indigenous communities, putting a heavy stress on women.*

A perennial scourge for Lumad inhabitants living on the borders between Christian and Muslim communities is becoming prey to armed bandits who are engaged in cattle rustling, theft, and extortion.

*9.2 Rido between families or clans is a constant source of violent conflict in Moro communities.*

In the ARMM and in local bailiwicks of Moro landlords and politicians, intermittent conflicts arising from family or clan feuds or rido heavily contribute to the tension and general lack of peace in the area. These sporadic clashes often lead to killings and to the evacuation of civilians who fear being caught in the crossfire. At high risk in this ritual of revenge are the female members or children of the family involved who may be kidnapped or taken hostage as a way to dishonor or get back at the opponent's family.

*9.3 The lack of faith in government and the worsening poverty in the uplands have attracted many men to rebel causes.*

Alienation from mainstream development processes and the general

lack of unemployment have drawn increasing numbers of Moro and Lumad men into rebellion, leaving the responsibility of family maintenance in the hands of women. The New People's Army (NPA) now gets most of its recruits from young unemployed Lumad men, while Islamic rebel groups continue to draw adherents, a good number of them children below eighteen.

*9.4 Rebellion in the countryside makes indigenous women unwilling hosts to roving armies.*

Lumad and Moro women are constantly subjected to harassment as a result of the continuing war between government troops and rebel forces. Roving government soldiers accuse them of being rebel sympathizers and demand that they participate in government anti-insurgency campaigns, while rebel groups pressure them into supporting their causes and paying revolutionary taxes.

*9.5 Under extreme pressure from government soldiers and in the midst of destruction wrought on their villages by the military, the Moro women seek to protect their men.*

In the face of pressures from enemy soldiers who threaten their survival, Moro women assume multiple roles: wives and mothers protecting their rebel husbands and sons; nurses who tend to the wounded; couriers who smuggle information, food, medicine, and ammunition; and caretakers who look after the survival needs of the young (Cagoco-Guiam 2003).

*9.6 Even as Moro women stand by their men in their struggle for the defense of their homeland and communities, they are also the strongest proponents of peace.*

War victimizes women more than men, as so often it is their husbands, their livelihoods, their shelter, and their children that are taken by war. War extracts the highest price from women: with the disappearance of their men, they are left to fend for their families and themselves.

## 10. Women and Public Leadership

*10.1 Political office continues to be the domain of men and the few women who have gained political positions have largely ridden on their family's coattails.*

Public leadership remains in the hands of men and the handful of women who have made it have done so mainly on the strength of their family's political power. Apart from a very few exceptions, most of these women have been trained and seasoned in the ways of traditional politics.

10.2 *Even as women's groups continue to campaign for greater participation in politics, the field remains resistant to the presence of females.*

While more women have been seeking political office, few seats have been actually taken. In this year's election, only ten women from Mindanao were voted into the House of Representatives. In total, there are four female governors, three city mayors, and eighteen municipal mayors (GABRIELA 2004).

10.3 *Females form the bulk of the bureaucracy but they do not proportionately occupy top positions.*

Female employees make up the bulk of government personnel in Mindanao although women's participation in decision-making and the political process is marginal. Women generally occupy the second level career positions while men predominate in the first level and elective positions.

## 11. Women, Hope of Mindanao

Women suffer the most because of failed and misguided policies that have exacerbated the unpeace and underdevelopment in Mindanao. But the women also hold the key to peace and development in Mindanao.

There are many women and organizations who through the years have tirelessly led communities towards the development of Mindanao in various fields. A women's organization in Misamis Occidental, for example, took upon itself the task of addressing the issue of safe potable water in 490 barangays, in recognition of the enormous importance water has to the daily life of other women. There are those women who, even under severe circumstances, have organized their meager resources to ensure the survival of their family.

Many women and their children recognize that in war there are no victors, and that rebuilding war-torn communities need their commitment to root out the causes of the conflict in Mindanao and in the GRP-MILF peace negotiations. Mindanao women leaders have taken their place at the negotiating table. There are many women who have crossed political and cultural boundaries, who use their extraordinary position to enhance the interface of statutory governance and the dynamics of the traditional tribal political system.

Provincial women organizations have also established gender and development centers that serve as temporary shelters for victims and survivors of violence against women and children.

These women and women groups have truly provided inspiration to many women, whose leadership and engagement in various fields of endeavor are worth emulating.

Truly, in Mindanao hope has a woman's face.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Developed by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), HDI is based on the unweighted average of three indicators of wellbeing: longevity, as measured by life expectancy at birth; educational attainment, as measured by a combination of adult literacy (two-thirds weight) and combined primary, secondary, and tertiary enrolment ratios (one-third weight); and standard of living, as measured by real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita.

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