ECOFEMINISM: WOMEN’S WORK ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN SORSOGON PROVINCE, PHILIPPINES

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Abstract  
This paper describes the perspectives of ecofeminism and the roles of women in environmental protection and conservation. It also discusses the experiences of women in environmental protection and conservation work in the Province of Sorsogon, Philippines. The discussion is based on a study which looked into issues such as women’s perspectives of the environment; the nature of their participation in environmental protection and conservation; the challenges they encountered and the approaches they adapted in relation to the challenges; the roles played in the environmental protection and conservation; and their views on the connection between women and environment.

Background  
The importance of protecting and conserving the natural resources is now recognized by the governmental and non-governmental institutions both in the local and international level. Peoples organizations and non-governmental organizations are playing an essential role in the environmental movements. There are initiatives in the local and national level that struggle to resolve local and national environmental problems. The main assumption of the proposed pro-active position is what the initiative we must start to be seen from the perspective of the proper combination and balance of the human ecology and environmental ecology – that should be grounded within a holistic development paradigm.

This paper focused on the importance of women in relation to environment and development. In the developing countries like the Philippines, women’s relationship with the environment is vital to their daily lives, for example the provision of water, fuel wood, food and other basic needs. These women are not only forced of environmental management, but their importance as key agents in achieving sustainable development cannot be exaggerated. The insights provided by the women in Sorsogon, Philippines is that women and nature are associated not passivity but in creativity and the sustainability of life.
This endeavor looked into women’s work on environmental protection and conservation in the Province of Sorsogon, Philippines. Specifically, this study underscored the following: a) Women’s perspective of environment; b) Nature of women’s participation in the protection and conservation of the environment; c) Women’s motivations for working on environmental protection and conservation; d) The challenges encountered and the approaches women’s adapted in relation to the challenges encountered; e) The roles women’s played in their works toward environmental protection and conservation; and f) Their views on the connection of the women and environment.

This study is a feminist research in character. This research employed the qualitative methods of research utilizing a case study. The key informants in this study are adult women, all came from the Province of Sorsogon, Philippines and who have been directly and actively involved in the activities toward environmental protection and conservation. The key informants were purposively chosen. They came from various institutions or organizations both from public and private sectors, and who are directly engaged in the programs and projects toward environmental protection and conservation. Qualitative interviewing that was dialogical and interactive was observed in the conduct of the study.

The study was anchored on the theory of Vandana Shiva, which places a high premium of “feminine principle” as a source of life. Women according to her are the original givers of life and caretakers of environment, and it is the western patriarchal development strategies and western science that have displaced the feminine principle and victimized women, non-western people and the environment. Shiva further argued that the marriage of patriarchy and capitalism has subjugated women to the environment.

In the same manner, Bina Agarwal, also expresses the victimization of women in political, economic and gendered terms. For her, patriarchy and the process of statisation and privatization impoverish women and render them the hardest hit by environmental damage. Similarly, the feminist theory asserted that patriarchy is the main cause of women’s oppression, subordination and abuse.

Both Shiva and Agarwal on the other hand, asserted that women should be the central actors in environmental management, by their closeness to the resources base due to their daily survival tasks and their being caught in the maelstrom of environmental degradation in the process. They believed that being the privileged caretaker of the environment is the key to women empowering themselves. Women are propelled to actions more conducive to environmental protection and regeneration.

Furthermore, this paper argues that women are directly affected by the state of environment because of the traditional roles imposed by the patriarchal system of the society to the women like, providing and preparing food; cleaning of the house; washing of the clothes and dishes; gathering of fuel wood; fetching water; and taking care of the children. The multi-faceted roles of women leads to their multiple burdens because of society’s sexist and discriminatory practices which are based on the patterns of patriarchal culture.

A. Women’s Perspectives of Environment:

The state of environment affects the well-being of man and the entire web of creation.
Most of the women key informants viewed environment as the life support system of man. Without the environment we cannot survived. Basically the life of man is dependent to the environment. It is the source of all life.

Similarly, women considered environment as our whole surroundings which comprises of the land, water, air and other life-forms. It is likewise the place we live in that we have to love and cherished. Our environment gives us everything and provides us all.

Moreover, women also believed that environment as GOD’s total creation, it is GOD’s gift that we have to preserved, since our life is dependent on the environment because life will not be peaceful, we will not be healthy and we will not enjoy a good life without good environment. Good people are products of good environment.

Most of us viewed environment as the life support system of man. Without it we cannot possibly survived. That is in this context that our environment plays a vital roles in the well-being of the humans and other living organisms.

B. Nature of Women’s Participation in the Environmental Protection and Conservation.

The women key informants have varied participation and involvement in environmental protection and conservation work. In general women’s nature of involvement is on the technical, policy advocacy, project proposal conceptualization, planning, and program designing and supervising the implementation of a particular environmental projects and programs. Most of these women were actively participating in the tree planting, mangrove reforestation, coastal clean-up, waste segregation and solid waste management.

On the technical trainings, they facilitate environmental scanning and environmental understanding among the community people. They mobilized, organized and capacitated communities by providing the community people trainings and assistance in the technical and organizational management.

Further women have their own works in the protection and conservation of the environment which are aimed at inculcating the values and practices of environmental awareness and consciousness rising of all people.

People’s participation in the management of the natural resources is crucial. All to often excluded from the decision-making level, women have developed their own informal approaches to solving problems. Rural women groups represents the first level of the institutional framework needed to ensure bottom-up development processes. In which women have an important role, in the development requirements and source of traditional know-how, these are vital inputs to activities involved in the sustainable use of natural resources.

Above all, we cannot discount the significant roles and contributions of the women in the natural resources management, and environmental protection and conservation.

C. Motivations of the Key Informants for Working for the Environmental Protection and Conservation

The women key informants basically manifested their deep motivations in working for the protection and conservation of the environment despite of the waves they are facing, they were not discourage to go on.

Even their work on environmental protection and conservation were not economically
viable for them they are encouraged to work because because they are aware and conscious that there is no other way to protect ourselves and our family and our LIFE but to protect our environment –Mother Earth. Our Mother Earth is the sources of our lives, the food and the air we breathe.

Since we have only one planet, so whatever damages that the planet that we are going to we will be the one to be affected. In our ends we have to do something in putting a halt on the destruction of our environment because we cannot go back. Therefore it is a personal commitment and realization that there is an urgent needs to protect and conserved our environment. It comes to the understanding of the key informants that there is no other place for us to live, we have to take care of our Mother Earth- it has all life sustaining elements. Women believed that Life should be protected and we should protect life.

Further, women are motivated to work for the protection and conservation of the environment not for themselves but for the community and for the next generations, which gives them a sense of self-fulfillment to be an instrument to have a better environment.

Furthermore, with the education, trainings and seminars attended by women it further intensified and developed their motivations and commitments to work for the protection and conservation of the environment. It is through their activities that they have a better understanding and appreciated the important of taking care of the environment.

These women are assuming personal responsibility for their lives by reclaiming the natural capacities that are their birthright as children of life. Likewise, they are affirming the perspective that remind us of the original goodness and sanctity of all life.

Moreover, these women are using their creative and productive energies to work for the environment to express their deep concerns for their children and future generations. These efforts used as their vehicle to sustain, maintain and continue the breathe of life that originally comes from them.

D. Challenges Encountered in the Environmental Protection and Conservation Work.

Womens are being challenged on how to continuously sustain their commitment to protect and conserved the environment. For the women key informants number one challenge to them is the insufficient funding and budget allocated in implementing the programs and projects for the protection and conservation of the environment.

Another challenged is the economic situation of the family and of the women, and their survival which challenged how they will response to the present needs of protecting and conserving our environment. Likewise the poverty situations in the community, if there is no food on their table, how they will response to the needs for protecting our environment. They very challenge is their empty stomach, people were always thinking of the day to day survival. Further the challenge is how to sustain the commitment of the community to cooperate and participate in working for the protection and conservation of the environment.

Womens believed that another serious challenge to their work for environmental protection and conservation is the level of awareness and the consciousness of every individual how to take care of the environment and on how to change peoples attitudes and developed their love for liveable environment, clean air, clean water and better food production. Further peoples poor appreciations to the projects and the lack of cooperation and participation in the implementation of the programs and projects for the protection and conservation of the environment.
Moreover, the political system which disregarded the participation of the women in the development planning and decision-making process at the local level is not deliberate, it is being politicized. That the LGU’s has no sense of responsibility and lack of conscience they do not see environment as important things as reflected on the development programs that the LGU’s introduced in the community. These political culture, the bureaucracy and the corruption in all agencies is further challenged the implementation of programs and projects for the protection and conservation of the environment.

Women remain largely absent at all levels of policy formulation and decision-making in the natural resources and environmental management, conservation, protection and rehabilitation. These are institutional weaknesses in coordination between women’s non-governmental organizations and national institutions which are dealing with environmental issues which most the cases they are divided because of the clash in their interests. Despite the recent growth and visibility of women’s non-governmental organizations working on the issues of the environment still they are challenged because of the different priorities of the LGU’s and of the national government. Moreso, the political culture, the bureaucracy and the corruption at all levels of the government agencies added to the burdens of family survival and welfare, and the deterioration of our environment.

E. Approaches Adapted in Response to the Challenge Encountered.

Women key informants identified approaches in dealing with the challenges they are facing in their work for the protection and conservation of the environment.

Among the approaches they adapted are: they do house to house campaigns, they are starting on the basic learning to make people understand the environment the resources they are using, their livelihood, and their roles to sustain their livelihood; they conduct information education campaigns through YES-O camps, seminars on environmental issues, environmental protection and conservation education, initiates projects and contests that will promote the consciousness and awareness of the pupils, teachers, parents and the community people towards a balanced ecology and for sustainable development, organized symposia and invites authorities to give information and orientations about environment, solid waste management, global warming, climate change and adaptation, and disaster risk reduction. Building linkages, networking and partnership with the NGO’s and some LGU’s working for environmental protection and conservation. Likewise, they do lobbying and advocacy works with NGO’s and LGU’s to take part in the responsibility of protecting and conserving the environment. Similarly, they involved the private sectors like the media and other institutions to be partners in their work for the environment.

Furthermore, they initiate trainings and capacity building activities. They also provide cross-learning experience to the community leaders by bringing and exposing them to other places to observed and learned in the popular way. They do community organizing, PO building, community education, research and partnership. They involved the community leaders and members in the planning and decision-making process.

Moreso, they provides complimentary livelihood particularly to those who will be affected in the process of the protection and conservation work. They trained people and provided them with
tools and equipments for their complimentary livelihood.

No amount of doctrines and preaching to the community people about the perils of a corrupted environment, the dangers of irresponsible disposal of wastes or deforestation and the benefits to mankind of greening the environment will make people act to forestall environmental degradation unless they are imbued with a deep concerns for the common good, a sense of responsibility for maintaining a balanced and healthful ecosystem and a strong drive to achieved harmony with the nature.

It is only through education that one can generate awareness, commitment and ability to translate both in concrete actions. A sustainable environment is not possible without education that will reshape the collective consciousness and conscience and to influence everyday life. That environmental protection as a way of life and it should starts within one’s heart.

F. Roles Played or Envisioned to be Played in Environmental Protection and Conservation Work.

The women key informants acknowledged and recognized the vital roles of the women in the protection and conservation of the environment. Women can really go extramiles for the protection and conservation of the environment because it happens that the first that will be affected by environmental degradation are the women. Thus women particularly mothers should see the plight of their children, they should do something to protect their children.

Most of the key informants believed that women has many roles to play in relation to the protection and conservation of the environment. Women as a role model so that she can be a catalysts for sustainable environment, to be an educator and be a good example. As a woman it is her role to educate and give her children consciousness and awareness about the importance of the environment. Women should be a watchers, caretakers and cleaners of the environment. Further, women should be observant to those who destroyed the environment; women should always be alert; as a mother, as a woman and as a leader, it is her role to enlightened and opened the eyes of the people in the community by giving orientation and consciousness about the real state of the environment in the community, it is the role of the women to educate about the actual utilization of the different resources since she has the concept of conservation because she is the one who do budgeting inside the house, women should know how to use their resources wisely; women should act first in the protection of the environment because the women especially the mothers are the one who take care and nurture the children and the young; women should instilled in the minds of their children and other children’s that all of us has a roles to play in the protection and conservation of our environment; women should also be a keen observant and committed in the protection and conservation of the environment; women should have the concerns, conscience and consciousness on environment, they should have a deeper consciousness and women should be nurturing; women should know what is right, should be a role model to her children particularly on how to take care the environment, conserved water and other resources, how and where to disposed their wastes; as a woman and as a mothers, women should be a leader role models, they should practiced what they preached so that the community and individuals will appreciate it and will follow what thy are been talking; it is important for women to sit in the decision-making process to integrate their perspectives on concerns and matters about environment; above all, the role of the women starts inside the womb, as a mother should have a
healthy environment to live, women should have a healthy outlook in life.

Aside from the reproductive role of the women, the women performed vital roles in the environmental protection and conservation, all over the world. Women play a crucial role in the environmental management; as farmers, fishers, suppliers of fuel, stockbreeders, and water managers they interact most closely with environment. They are the managers and often they preserve natural resources. The crucial roles of women in environmental issues and concerns has been long recognized in the country.

The protection and conservation of our environment should be everyone concerns and responsibility because we are all directly affected by any changes and problems that we face to our environment, plus we are living in one planet thus we do not have any other place to live. Regardless of gender, age, occupation and education, we should be all responsible in protecting and conserving our natural environment.

G. Perspectives on the connections of Women and Environment.

The connections of the women and the environment as described by the key informants can be linked to the roles that women have to perform. The roles of the women are directly affected by the state of environment.

Moreover, the connection of women and environment is manifested in terms of productivity, continuity, and sustainability of environment and mankind through the reproductive roles of the women. Like nature, women are life-givers, nurturers of life and providers for the sustenance of life particularly for the young. In terms of resource utilizations, women are the major users of the natural resources like the coastal and water resources, forest resources and other resources. Thus, the women are directly affected by the state of environment because of the roles that they have to perform like providing and preparing the food, cleaning of the house, washing of the clothes and dishes, gathering of fuel wood, fetching water, and taking care of the children.

Women and environment has a deep connections, their connections can be linked in the productivity, continuity, and sustainability of the environment and mankind. Like Mother Nature, women believed to be life-givers, nurterer of life and providers for the sustenance of life. These roles said to be womens deep connections to the Mother Earth. Without the women continuity and regeneration of life will not be possible.

Though it is been said that not only women are connected to the environment, it is all gender for that matter because we get our life from the natural environment. A good environment is a good life. Good people are products of good environment.

In the case of the degradation of the environment.

On the issues of degradation of the environment the key informants shared their sentiments.

As revealed by women, they strongly believed that: degradation of the environment is equal to the degradation of women because of the roles that they need to perform. Women’s roles are highly dependent to the environment; degradation of environment is also very destructive to women and to the mothers, it deprived them of a better life and better resources, it violates the rights of the women, the rights of their children and the rights of mother nature; degradation of the environment it makes motherhood more difficult, it degraded the opportunities of the women, they grew up in poverty because of their multiple burdens, that leads to their
victimizations of human trafficking and prostitution; for the poor families in particular, the survival of the family is deeply connected to the environment because they engaged in subsistence livelihood, it affects the family’s way of life particularly the women since they are in-charged of family’s food security and welfare; the destruction of the environment is very detrimental to the lives of the women because they are the ones who are directly working in the forests, in the farms and the main users of the different resources; above all, the degradation of the environment is equal to the destruction of the family especially the poor families who are dependent to the natural environment.

We are convinced that there are no other groups that are most affected by environmental degradation than women particularly the poor women. Everyday, everydawn rings with it a long walk in search of food, water, and fuel. It does not matter if the women are old, young or pregnant: crucial households needs to have to be met. As ecological conditions worsened, it degraded the opportunities of the women.

Conclusions

Based from the foregoing findings the following conclusions are derived:

1. Women viewed environment as the life support systems of man. It is the source of all life, that men are dependent on the environment. Without good environment, our life will not be peaceful, will not be healthy and we will not enjoy good life.

2. Women’s involvement on environmental protection and conservation work is crucial in the management and utilization of the natural resources. In general, the key informants are involved in the technical, policy, project proposal conceptualization, planning and program designing, and supervising the implementation of the project.

3. Women’s commitment and dedication to work for the environment is a manifestation of their selfless love and concerns for the environment; to their children; and for the future generation. Even though this work is not economically viable for themselves because they are aware and conscious that there is no other way to protect ourselves and our family but to protect Mother Earth.

4. Women’s limited access and opportunities in the decision-making process constraints to their advancement and to their overall status. It only means that lot of sacrifices woman have to face along the course of their work on the environmental protection and conservation.

5. The lack of awareness, consciousness and commitment; how to change the attitude of the people towards environment; how to care for the environment; how to developed their love for livable environment; how to shift the paradigm of the local leaders on sustainable development and environment; and how to sustained the programs and projects for the protection of the environment are the significant challenges.

6. Women played multiple roles in the family, community, and in the protection and management of the natural resources. Their multifaceted roles leads to their multiple burdens.

7. Women’s perspective on the connections of women and environment are linked to the roles that women’s has to performed like providing and preparing foods for the family, cleaning the house, washing of the
clothes and dishes, gathering of fuel wood, fetching water, and taking care of the children. Further, women’s roles are directly affected by the state of environment because women are the main utilizers of the resources like the coastal and water resources, forest resources and other land resources.

8. Women viewed degradation of environment as equal to the degradation of woman because it deprived them to have a better life; better resources; and it makes motherhood more difficult because it degraded the opportunities of the women. Similarly, degradation of environment is equal to the destruction of the family.

9. Achieving sustainable environment and development will be possible only through collaborative works and efforts of all the STAKEHOLDERS, the women and men, the young and the old, communities, church, academe, LGU’s, civil society groups, business, and the households. It should be the concern for everyone to protect and conserve Mother Nature because all of us depends to the environment and we live in ONE PLANET.

Recommendations

The study offers the following recommendations:

1. The government through the local government units should be serious and honest in implementing the existing environmental laws. For the national government there is a need to revisit some environmental laws like of the mining law, and the passage of the total commercial log ban bill and the full implementation of the Philippine Agenda 21. Likewise, there is a need to popularize good environmental laws and other instruments related to the environment and development.

2. A more comprehensive study of how women as affected by environmental degradation should be conducted. A monitoring mechanism on the effects of the hazardous and toxic chemicals, waste, products and technologies on women and men should be installed by both the governmental and non-governmental organizations.

3. The Local Government Units should familiarize, analyze, and study the ecosystem. Research should be conducted along with the state of environment, pollution, environmental standards, and other environmental concerns like of the impacts of climate change and global warming.

4. For the local community leaders should capacitate the members of the community by continuously raising their consciousness and awareness through community education, seminars and fora. They should continuously re-educate the people on the importance of the environment. Likewise, they should take an active role in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs and projects.
whose objectives are towards conservation of biodiversity.

5. Environmental education that is gender sensitive and gender-responsive should be given both in formal and non-formal setting. The primary goal of this is to raise environmental awareness and consciousness and actions of the majority of the population so they will be more vigilant and committed in keeping watch over the environment.

6. To the Academic Institutions it is good if they can integrate environmental education in the curriculum. Likewise, they should have a massive advocacy for environmental care by continuous holding of fora and symposia on issues concerning global warming, climate change, climate change adaptation, solid waste management, and disaster risk reduction.

7. To the Non-Government Organizations should continue carry out programs and projects that will facilitate the access of women to knowledge, skills, and environmentally sound technologies to support and strengthen their vital roles and expertise in resource mobilization and resource management, and the conservation of biodiversity.

8. To the women of Sorsogon Province they should be assertive of their rights by involving themselves in the environmental decision-making process at all levels, involve themselves as managers, project planners, implementers, and evaluators of developmental programs and projects.

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