

# **Engendering Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in the Context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda**

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## **Introduction**

“Let no one be left behind.” This is the fearless premise and promise of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda being pursued globally amidst the persistent poverty, extreme inequality, recurring financial and food crises, climate change and its disastrous impacts gripping the world today.

Although extreme poverty defined as surviving below USD1.90 a day went down to ten percent in 2015, almost half (45 percent) of the world population are still poor, meaning they are living below USD5.50 a day. (World Bank, 2018). “Inequality is keeping people trapped in poverty,” (Oxfam, 2019) as the number of billionaires has grown in tandem with their wealth since the global financial crisis struck the globe ten years ago and caused enormous suffering among mostly ordinary folk who belong to the 99 percent. In 2018, 26 super-rich people owned an amount of wealth equivalent to that of the poorest half of humanity. Hunger is on the increase, affecting 851 million or one out of nine people, and stunting the growth of 150 million children. (WHO, 2018)

Climate change and the “extreme weather events” it generates have wreaked havoc on food security and the quality of life of vulnerable populations. According to one report, “2018 saw unprecedented heatwaves, storms and floods across the globe, and global greenhouse gas emissions continued to grow last year, with the current concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere the highest it has been in 3 million years.” Yet climate action is lagging far behind what is necessary to stem the already alarming level of global warming, reflecting ‘environmental policy failure’ on the part of many governments. (UNFCCC, 2019).

These intractable and overlapping problems have been widely attributed to a flawed development model based solely on the profit motive. (Utting, 2015:1). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which includes SDG 5 on gender equality, are in themselves responses seeking to correct, if not transform, an increasingly unacceptable world order perceived to be bringing the whole of humanity to the brink of destruction, if not extinction. However, since the SDGs are in themselves results of negotiations between and among governments, business interests, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders, they can be both limiting and liberating depending on how forces for positive change can critically engage in the complex processes of SDG implementation.

In a world where almost half (48.5 percent) of all women, who are not in the labor force (ILO, 2018) , are being left behind by the engine of dizzying growth and technological change

aggravating existing forms of inequality even more, the challenge of including and empowering them and other marginalized groups is an awesome one. Given the 2030 Development Agenda, which has provided a sense of hope and direction despite its limitations, how can women in poverty as well as other vulnerable groups take advantage of its existence and assumed implementation to realize their aspirations for a life of dignity and prosperity in a crises-ridden world?

One pathway being tried out in many places is Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), part of a concerted effort to search for and apply in practice people-and planet-centered alternatives that are inclusive and sustainable. For women in particular, however, such alternatives must also address their most urgent issues and lead to their empowerment.

As defined by the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy, SSE “refers to the production of goods and services by a broad range of organizations and enterprises that have explicit social and often environmental objectives, and are guided by principles and practices of cooperation, solidarity, equity and democratic self-management.” (UNTFSSSE, 2014:1).

Social protection and equality are central to building this form of economy. As explained by a leading SSE proponent within the UN system, “The SSE movement that is growing worldwide is attempting to reassert social control over the economy by prioritizing social objectives above profit maximization, recognizing the key role of collective action and active citizenship for both economic and political empowerment of disadvantaged groups in society, and reintroducing notions of ethics, sharing, equity and democracy in economic activity.” (Utting, 2015:1).

As further described by a Filipino proponent, SSE has five important dimensions which may be used for assessing existing models: 1) socially responsible governance; 2) edifying values; 3) products and services for social development; 4) environmental conservation measures; and 5) economic sustainability. (Quinones, 2014:1-30).

But as borne out by evidence obtained from SSE organizations such as cooperatives, which will be presented later in this paper, these are not necessarily supportive of women’s empowerment. This paper, therefore, aims to explore this dilemma by attempting to answer the following question: Do SSE initiatives documented in existing case studies within Asia, particularly in the Philippines and other ASEAN member countries, consciously pursue the SDG on gender equality as they aspire to realize other SDG goals?

Its objectives include:1) To examine the relationship between SSEs and the achievement of SDG goal number 5 on gender equality in available case studies from the region; 2) To surface gains and gaps in these initiatives by employing SDG and SSE evaluation criteria; and 3) To make recommendations for future action based on insights culled from the research.

### **SSE and SDG 5 on Gender Equality**

According to SSE advocates, SSEs can be instrumental in achieving the 2030 Development Agenda by addressing many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (UNTFSSSE, 2014). With

respect to SDG 5, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” SSE initiatives can be relevant to the following specific targets:

- 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and family.
- 5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.
- 5.6 Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land, other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

SSE organizations include “cooperatives, mutual and self-help groups, community-based organizations managing forests and other common pool resources, fair trade networks, associations of informal economy workers, and new forms of social enterprise.” (Utting, 2015:1) Many, if not most members of SSE organizations are women. Many SSE organizations are led by women who have been empowered by organizing and capacity building processes common among SSEs. The pursuit of gender equality goals within SSEs thereby becomes stronger and more visible, inviting increased attention to the need to address the unequal gender division of labor. Within this context, a major finding is that women do much more unpaid care work than men, which prevents them from spending time and focusing effectively on their productive work in SSE initiatives. (IDS, IDRC, Oxfam, 2016).

Aside from transforming the gender division of labor, the other strategic need of women which has to be addressed in an SSE context is for them to be able to participate meaningfully in both economic and political decision-making. Initially, this can be at the enterprise, household, and community levels, but eventually, this can extend all the way to national, regional, and global levels.

The above assertions are supported by a recently conducted study on women in cooperatives by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). The study showed that there had been progress in terms of increasing numbers of women-owned cooperatives and women’s membership in cooperatives. However, according to respondents in this same study, women comprised less than 50 percent of the governing boards and of the management positions. Fifty percent of these respondents also claimed that there had never been any training or awareness-raising session on gender issues. (Schincariol McMurtry, and McMurtry, 2015:14-16). Thus, it seems that a lot of challenges still remain in the journey of cooperatives towards gender equality and women’s empowerment.

### **Women’s enduring issues: unpaid care work and informal employment**

Solidarity economy as a pathway to make change work for women acquires urgency given existing constraints to gender equality and women’s empowerment.

UN Women has recently provided global data on women’s situation specific to particular SDGs. According to a document released in 2018, the proportion of women living in extreme poverty is higher than that of men: 122:100. More than 30 percent of income inequality is due to inequality

within the household, particularly that between women and men. More women (11 percent) report suffering from food insecurity compared to men. Only 13 percent of agricultural landholders are women. There are 15 million girls who will not be able to read or write compared to ten million boys. During disasters, women and girls are 14 times more likely to die. (UN Women, 2018:6-7).

Data on unpaid care work show that globally, women and girls, especially those in poverty, shoulder a disproportionate burden compared to men and boys. They spend 2.6 times more time on such work. (UN Women, 2018:6-7). The gender division of labor has proven to be a well-entrenched and widely observable reality, with cultural norms dictating that women take on tasks necessary to maintain domestic life and keep households running in the reproductive sphere. Men, on the other hand, play the role of breadwinner doing remunerated work in the productive sphere, and wield visible power in public life.

Because women are largely tied to the home, the value of their reproductive work is statistically invisible because it is generally not reflected in the National System of Accounts. Many of them (almost 50 percent in the Philippine case) are classified as “housewives” and considered not in the labor force, meaning that they are not considered economically active. Globally, 48 women out of 100 are in the labor force, compared to 75 out of 100 men (ILO, 2018:Table 1, 7). For many of those not in the labor force, the time they spend on doing unpaid care work leaves them no opportunity to engage in work that earns a clear and visible income. This phenomenon, called “time poverty,” is more apparent among grassroots women in rural and urban poor areas, who have no access to basic utilities and social services, and who cannot afford hired help or labor-saving devices. Such deprivation can have harmful effects on health and even on life itself. According to global data released by UN Women, 80 percent of household water collection, which can be very time-consuming and back-breaking, is done by women and girls. Inefficient stoves using combustible fuel within households and resulting in harmful indoor pollution claimed 4.3 million lives in 2012, 60 percent of whom were those of women and girls. (UN Women, 2018:6-7).

Grassroots women who are able to engage in productive work, despite their reproductive burden, are found mostly among the working poor in the informal economy in both urban and rural areas. Among their ranks are home-based workers and store owners, vendors, small farmers and fisherfolk, unpaid or contributing family workers in household farms and micro-enterprises, waste recyclers, domestic and other service workers doing laundry, massage, hair and nail care, etc. They do work that are compatible with or akin to reproductive work, and since this work is considered secondary or supplemental to the productive work that men do, the pay is usually dismally low, working conditions are substandard, and social protection is lacking or completely absent.

Regional data on South and East Asia show that around 60 percent of those who work in the non-agricultural sector is in informal employment, and the range is from 42 percent in Thailand to 84 percent in India. (ILO, 2014:12). In the Philippines, one credible source claims that more than 80 percent (33 million out of 40.7 million) of employed workers are informal. (PIDS, 2018). Many women who are employed are in the bottom rungs of the informal economy. Their vulnerable and unprotected situation magnifies the issues emanating from their dual status as women and as

workers deprived of rights and benefits enjoyed by men and by those who are in formal employment.

The scale of informal employment and non-realization of rights resulting from this has given rise to the global discourse on transitioning from the informal to the formal economy embodied in the 2014 report of the International Labour Conference. In the transitioning document, solidarity economy is identified as an important component of informal employment and as a strategy for facilitating formalization. (ILO, 2014). In other words, it is seen as a pathway towards more and better work that is recognized and protected, that is productive yet sustainable, that pays more, that is more regular, that is more marketable, and can provide flexibility in meeting family responsibilities while maintaining work-life balance . (Pineda Ofreneo, 2014).

Decades of discussion regarding the unequal gender division of labor have not made a sizeable reduction in the obviously intractable burden of unpaid care work for both housewives and women and the informal economy. This has led to an increasing resolve to systematically address the issue as articulated in SDG Goal No. 5. The three Rs responding to unpaid care work—recognition, reduction, and redistribution -- have captured the imagination of gender advocates in many countries. The care diamond, which places responsibilities not only on households, but also on the state, the market, and civil society organizations, provides a base for advocating change among all these actors.

But since gender equality is a human right, the state is considered to be the principal duty bearer and is primarily accountable for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling this right. The state, therefore, is expected to recognize unpaid care work by including it in the National System of Accounts. It is tasked to provide basic utilities such as water and electricity to reduce unpaid care work devoted to fetching water and gathering fuel sources. It is mandated to extend accessible and affordable public and social services such as child and elderly care, health care, community kitchens, laundry stations, transportation facilities, education, decent housing, etc., that will also reduce the time spent by household members, especially women and girls, in taking care of the young, the old, and the sick, in preparing food and cleaning clothes, in marketing and taking/fetching children to and from school, etc. By taking on these obligations, the state will not only reduce unpaid care work but also help in redistributing it.

Redistribution may occur at the initiative not only of the state but of the various actors in the care diamond as well. At the household level, more men and boys can have a bigger and more equitable share of unpaid care work. Women and girls can facilitate this change if they become more conscious of the need to transform the gender division of labor through awareness-raising done in school, through media, and women's movement advocacy. SSE initiatives of community-based groups and other civil society organizations can lead in similar awareness-raising activities to enable women to participate more actively in economic ventures as well as take on community leadership positions. Market-based production activities can have built-in child care mechanisms such as lactating stations for mothers and play stations for young children.

### **Case Studies of SSE Initiatives**

Do existing SSE initiatives consciously pursue the SDG on gender equality as they aspire to realize other SDG goals as well as the five dimensions of social and solidarity economy?

Four case studies presented during the ASEAN SSE Dialogue held in Quezon City in November 2017 under the sponsorship of the Asian Solidarity Economy Council (ASEC) show mixed results illustrating both gains and gaps. Two of these case studies focus on the rural poor in agricultural communities: one on the Orang Asli indigenous people in Malaysia, and the other on Prayatna Samiti self-help groups in Rajasthan, India. The other two case studies are on the working poor in the informal economy: one on Homenet Thailand, and the other on the PATAMABA in the Philippines, which the author updated through field interviews in March 2019.

### ***Orang Asli organic vegetable farm in Malaysia***

The Yayasan Kajian dan Pembangunan Masyarakat (YKPM, Malaysia) set up an organic vegetable farm in 2015 among the Orang Asli indigenous people. According to the author of the case study, “it is primarily designed to give hope in the face of helplessness... (as) current income and food source are being destroyed by a diminishing forest and an imposed cash economy. The farm enterprise is designed to improve their incomes by three fold and to strengthen their leadership through a SSE community enterprise.” (Kon, O.S. 2017:1). The long-term aim is to provide inspiration to other Orang Asli groups and make them believe in their capacity to enhance and transform their livelihoods and communities.

The organizers found that it was taking more time to develop leaders “of vision, integrity, and discipline... who will inspire hope and motivate others to move forward.” (Kon, O.S. 2017: 2). With respect to the SSE dimension of :”socially responsible governance,” they had to contend with traditional cultural structures . Thus, although the collective farm is formally managed by a committee of four (two men and two women), it is “under a larger oversight of the traditional leadership of the village council” consisting entirely of men. (Kon, 2017:2)

The business model based on collective ownership of the farm, and sharing of profits and benefits, was built on traditional values within the Orang Asli community. These seem to be consistent with the SSE dimension of “edifying values.” The aim was for the farm to capture 60 percent of the retail price, and an additional ten percent for the community chest. Aside from the value of sharing, other values which the model sought to develop in the daily work routine of the members include cooperation, accountability, integrity and discipline. However, majority of the original members dropped out because they could not adjust to the group and to the routine.

With regard to the SSE dimension of “social development,” there are gains for the members such as access to land and capital, the creation of jobs and a fair market, an increase in incomes, and acquisition of organic farming and management skills. Hunger is addressed when villagers gain access to second grade vegetables which they can take home and eat. The non-use of chemicals is consistent with the SSE dimension of “environmental conservation” But the “economic sustainability” dimension remains a challenge that has to be addressed through stronger partnership among the community leadership, fair markets, and civil society to upscale farm production, reduce dependence on subsidies, and build self-reliance.

### ***Prayatna Samiti in India***

A contrasting model is that of Prayatna Samiti, a voluntary organization founded in 1989 to facilitate the development of poor rural communities in Udaipur district of the Rajasthan state of India. The organization “believes in the collective strength of communities to achieve a just society, free of exploitative forces” and promotes “self empowerment among marginal farmers and rural labourers by developing institutional structures, management capacity, and leadership abilities.” (Prayatna Samiti, 2017: 1). It works in 120 villages with more than 50,000 people who have very little formal education.

Prayatna Samiti has focused on engaging women directly in development work, considering their participation crucial to livelihood improvement. There are 220 self-help groups (SHGs) aiming to empower women and reap collective economic gains recognized by the larger society. Girls’ education and enrollment in schools are promoted and facilitated. Women’s community leadership roles are continually honed through capacity building. Campaigns against gender-based violence have been mounted.

The SHGs comprise the basic form of SSE aimed at developing sustainable livelihood and community resilience. A revolving fund accessed through “intraloaning” among the SHGs enable women members to acquire inputs and assets such as land, seeds, cows, goats, animal shelters, etc. Seventy five social enterprises managed by local people have emerged from SHG lending; other economic activities have increased household capital. Small loans have been used for developing nurseries, vegetable gardens, crop seed production, dairy and goat-raising, while large ones have gone to building groceries and purchasing transportation facilities. Business development training has accompanied lending mechanisms.

Prayatna Samiti has also considered women’s participation as crucial in pursuing SDG no. 2 on ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture. Women are in charge of raising minor millets to improve calorie and protein intake, and increase community food consumption especially among women and girls. They have created grain banks and nutrition gardens following good agricultural practices.

The pursuit of other SDGs through Prayatna Samiti activities contribute indirectly to gender equality. The revival and development of wells, and the availability of potable water in or near households not only address SDG no.6 on clean water and sanitation but also have the effect of reducing unpaid care work of women and girls in fetching water. Similarly, the use of more efficient and environmentally-friendly stoves not only leads to the mitigation of climate change (SDG no. 13); it also makes cooking healthier, faster and cheaper, thereby facilitating women’s work and contributing to achieving SDG No. 7 on clean and affordable energy. Self-help groups have been capacitated and mobilized in a participatory way to identify risks and to engage in climate change adaptation through livelihood practices such as procuring stronger seeds, better breed of goats, improved animal shelter, land leveling, and mixed cropping, among others.

Using the SSE dimensions in assessing Prayatna Samiti, it is clearly striving to achieve SSE status, seeing it as the key to sustainability and resilience. The organization's structures encourage participation and comply with the requisites of the SSE dimension of socially responsible governance, while its principles are consistent with the SSE dimension of edifying values. Achievements in social development are palpable, and the climate change mitigation and adaptation activities are consistent with the SSE dimension of environmental conservation. The SHGs and the social enterprises that have emerged from them provide a viable pathway towards the SSE dimension of economic sustainability.

### ***Homenet Thailand Association***

This association is a membership-based organization of home-based workers from northern, northeastern, southern, and central regions of Thailand, including Bangkok. It consists of women producer groups engaged in food, handicraft, and agricultural production. These groups cater to local, city, or foreign markets, depending on the scale of their operations. They are now challenged by stiff competition from cheaper products, which has led to uncertain income and livelihood. In response, they plan to form a social enterprise with support from the Rockefeller Foundation so they can network among themselves, develop their products, and improve their marketing. This plan is based on an SSE framework which includes members' ownership and participation, adherence to fair trade principles, employment of vulnerable groups (women workers, persons with disability, older persons), facilitating access to social protection, and production of healthy, safe, and environmentally friendly food and other products.

Homenet Thailand claims that it promotes socially responsible and social mission-oriented governance not only in the association of home-based workers but also in the Garments and Leatherwear Producers Cooperative, and the network of domestic workers (foreign and Thai) it helped organize. This is also in accordance with SDG no. 16 on building strong institutions. Homenet Thailand also brings to life edifying values such as solidarity with and assistance to vulnerable groups, while also pursuing SDG no. 1 on ending poverty.

Homenet Thailand's services that enhance social development include marketing products based on fair trade principles, employment of vulnerable groups, facilitating access to social welfare schemes, conducting workshops on occupational safety and health, as well as successful campaigns for health care for foreign domestic workers, and extending social security to informal workers. This is also in pursuit of SDG 3 on health and well-being, and SDG 10 on reducing inequalities. Regarding environmental conservation, Homenet Thailand is proud of its promotion of healthy organic food, support for women farmers to produce organic rice, and use of natural dyes in woven material. Economic sustainability is still a challenge but in developing this SSE dimension, Homenet Thailand is also pursuing SDG 8 on decent work and SDG15. on building the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities.

### ***PATAMABA (National Network of Informal Workers in the Philippines)***

In the Philippines, a women-organized national network of informal workers called PATAMABA has 16,000 members spread over eight regions and 34 provinces.

Although PATAMABA has many other examples of SSE initiatives, this particular case study focuses on PATAMABA chapters in the municipality of Angono, Rizal province found in two coastal barangays highly susceptible to flooding, namely, San Vicente and Kalayaan. The Kalayaan sub-chapter was established in 1992 and San Vicente followed in 1995. That time, majority of the women members were involved as subcontracted homeworkers in smocking and embroidery for the export market. Eventually, when demand for smocking declined and now is almost exclusively catering to the domestic market, other livelihood activities were explored.

The PATAMABA Rizal governance and advocacy framework has the following components: social protection, human development, asset reform (particularly on land and housing), employment and enterprise building, participation and recognition of informal workers. Recurrent and worsening experiences of flooding have also pushed PATAMABA members to address their vulnerability through disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) training and practice.

PATAMABA Rizal also highlights gender concerns in its work, holding workshops on gender and development (GAD), conducting para-legal training concerning violence against women and children (VAWC), and coming to the aid of VAWC survivors. A good example is that of a PATAMABA member who was once a battered woman but who later was able to send her husband to prison. Since she acquired new livelihood skills, she was able to support her family. She also learned about the anti-VAWC law through the organization. A recent group interview conducted with PATAMABA leaders revealed plans of the municipality to reserve space for a Women's Crisis Center as well as a child care facility in a common building which is also used for production by the various clusters. (Parilla, Nacario, and Amano, 2019). This initiative is the result of advocacy by the GAD Focal Point, where a PATAMABA leader sits.

PATAMABA members also became leaders in a social housing program in Angono. The 216 – strong PATAMABA Housing Association now enjoys a stable and accessible supply of water and electricity from service providers. They have worked to achieve this vast improvement since the time when water was being rationed and electricity had to be bought through sub-meters. They have also promoted the development of urban gardens for food security in the area. Angono producers are organized under the PATAMABA-WISE (Workers in the Informal Sector Enterprise) which is the livelihood arm of PATAMABA Rizal. It was registered with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the municipal government of Angono. It began with 29 members contributing Php200 each in 2009, and since then has expanded to 238 (overwhelmingly women, with less than ten men).

Angono, being one of the 1233 poorest municipalities in the Philippines, was covered by the Bottom Up Budgeting (BUB) program. The Angono BUB is spearheaded by the Local Poverty Reduction Action Team (LPRAT) composed of 28 members (14 from government and 14 civil society organizations or CSOs) chaired by the Mayor and co-chaired by Josephine "Olive" Parilla of PATAMABA WISE. LPRAT is mandated to facilitate the drafting, finalization and approval of the Local Poverty Reduction Action Plan (LPRAP) of the municipality primarily identified by the CSOs.

The BUB has its own project management team under the Local Poverty Reduction Action Office (LPRAO) which handles the day to day operations of the livelihood projects. There are production clusters (on rag making, doormat making, sewing curtains and bed linens, homecare products, accessories, box and picture-frame making made of water lily and recycled Ilocano cloth) mostly headed by PATAMABA WISE leaders who are compensated by the municipality with a small monthly allowance amounting to Php2000. The cluster heads supplement this allowance by also engaging in production paid through piece rates agreed upon collectively. The main buyers are the employees of the municipality and nearby communities, but some of the products are also bought through the Homenet Producers Cooperative, bazaars and mall displays. PATAMABA's participation in local governance facilitates access to state funding, resources, and support services. It helps that the Angono Municipality, which has won the Seal of Good Local Governance for three consecutive years, is committed to the BUB project process even after the exit of the Aquino government and BUB's renaming into Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities (ADM) and now to just Assistance to Municipalities (AM). However, with the coming elections, continuity is dependent on whether or not the winner of the mayoralty race will be just as supportive. Nevertheless, PATAMABA WISE is confident their production clusters can survive with or without government support, since many of these clusters had been in existence even before the BUB project started (Parilla, Nacario, and Amano, 2019).

PATAMABA also has had a good experience relating with the private sector. For example, PATAMABA WISE forged an agreement with Lafarge cement factory to use the latter's waste materials to produce *higantitos*' souvenirs which the Angono municipality used as giveaways to guests. Production, however, has stopped pending payment of receivables from the Municipality. (Parilla, Nacario, and Amano, 2019).

Relations with academe have developed through the years. For example, the Department of Women and Development Studies of the UPCSWCD has fielded practicum students in the area since the early 2000s, with partnership forged in gender awareness training and GAD planning, organizational development implementation of the anti-VAWC law, sexuality education for youth and older persons, feminist leadership, and social marketing. The Ateneo de Manila University engagement with PATAMABA Angono began with DRRM training, and is now moving on to youth-focused skills training in livelihood development, starting with the production of decorative boxes.

PATAMABA is a membership-based organization adhering to democratic principles. As explained in the case study, "it employs participatory governance in the management and operation of livelihood projects. The members own and govern their business because they are not mere members of the organization, but they are also the investors who are themselves involved in the production, marketing and management of their business." (Royandoyan, 2017:5). Opportunities for members to develop themselves are implied in the statement of its President, Josephine Parilla: "In participatory leadership, I want everyone to shine, not just the leader." (Royandoyan, 2017, 6).

What holds the organization together is not the experience of increased incomes, which at best remains supplementary but a sense of solidarity and belongingness which are the values the members hold dear. Members know that they can rely on each other for mutual aid during

critical times. They also put to life the traditional Filipino value of *tangkilikan*, which is important for SSE success. Parilla explains *tangkilikan* in this manner: “We produce, we sell and buy our own products. In return we provide our members the opportunity to earn. The more the members sell and buy, the more they earn.” (Royandoyan, 2017:6).

PATAMABA has contributed a lot to social development by ensuring that their products first of all address community needs. It provides fair compensation, encouraging incentives for product patronage, and flexible working conditions to women who also have to contend with child care and other family responsibilities. When they were working together in a common production center, producers made sure that space was reserved for children to play in. Surplus is plowed back to the members in the form of mutual aid and educational funds. Members benefit from awareness-raising on gender sensitivity and GAD, the Reproductive Health law, and the Kasambahay law, among others. Some have also undergone certificate courses on dressmaking, welding, and solar energy provision through cooperation with the Technical and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). These courses opened up better employment opportunities for the certificate holders.

PATAMABA’s production processes also exhibit a concern for the environment. Home care products are biodegradable. Findings of the Bureau of Product Standards of the Department of Trade and Industry show that WISE powdered laundry detergent soap and liquid dish washing soap have no hazardous chemical content. These are high quality community-based products. BUB home care products are made of coconut and sodium sulfate, and are safe for watering plants. Rags and doormats use recycled waste materials from nearby factories, and picture frames are made of water lily from the lake.

PATAMABA leaders, however, admit that they still have a long way to go before they achieve economic sustainability. They still rely on grants, and need to move towards self-reliance and better marketing through product development and wider networking. They have had productive relations with national agencies, local government, women’s organizations, and academic institutions such as the Ateneo de Manila University and the College of Social Work and Community Development of the University of the Philippines. Over time, and with the support of allies, they hope to truly achieve full SSE status.

### **Insights from the Case Studies**

The four case studies have contrasting features which bring out their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their possibilities and limitations in terms of developing the five dimensions of SSEs, and pursuing various SDGs, particularly SDG No. 5 on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The first one on the Orang Asli organic farm in Malaysia shows at the micro-level how gender, resource status, and ethnicity intersect to influence results. The farm has the potential of exemplifying a model which can provide sustainable livelihood as well as inspire hope in an indigenous community undergoing a challenging, if not painful transition. The model is project-based and emanates from an external NGO which is trying to build a strong governance structure anchored on traditional community leadership. The project claims success in building unity through good governance mechanisms in the farm management committee and strengthening the village

council leadership, which however remains all male. An unresolved issue therefore in terms of gender equality is women's inclusion in the community leadership. How this can be addressed is still an unanswered question.

Although the project since its founding in 2015 has had concrete gains in terms of increasing income, developing fair trade mechanisms, and networking with supporting institutions, it still has to be completely owned by the community and build a core of farm worker leaders with management and leadership capabilities to steer it towards self-reliance. For the group, SSE is not yet a reality, but an aspiration partially fulfilled. Gender equality and women's empowerment among the indigenous community are not yet consciously pursued.

The second one on Prayatna Samiti in rural India has had more than a quarter of century of experience and has focused on empowering women through self-help groups (SHGs) and social enterprises born from these SHGs. Women's gains are concrete in terms of increased incomes, more and healthier food, access to water, efficient and environmentally friendly cooking stoves, accumulation of assets and household capital, and participation in planning and implementation of programs. Education of girls as well as gender-based violence are concerns that are also addressed. Prayatna Samiti has moved ahead in terms of the five dimensions of SSEs and the pursuit of the SDG on gender equality and other related SDGs. Unpaid care work is assumed to have been reduced through access to water and better stoves. However, redistribution of this kind of work through a fairer gender division of labor within the household remains a question that can be further researched.

Homenet Thailand, which was founded in the early nineties, believes in the primacy of democratic and membership-based organizations. These include informal workers and other vulnerable groups as the key actors ready to work with other stakeholders in the community. It is an SSE proponent, organizing producer groups, cooperatives and social enterprises. It operates within the framework of providing informal workers legal and social protection based on decent work principles and ILO-recommended strategies towards transitioning from informality to formality. Its current concerns are ensuring product quality and development, sustained networking for marketing, SSE promotion and advocacy. In this endeavor, it aims to improve, expand, develop, upgrade, and upscale its current SSE initiatives while plowing back greater benefits to people and the environment. It is ready to advocate for policy reforms and state support, and converge with potential allies to ensure sustainability and resilience.

Although most of its members are women, being mostly home-based and domestic workers, gender equality is not clearly articulated as a goal although in practice it may indirectly be partially addressed. The gender division of labor and the resultant unpaid care work of women and girls are not yet problematized as significant barriers to the empowerment of workers in the informal economy, many of whom are women.

PATAMABA is a well-established people's organization founded in 1991, run and managed by homebased and other informal worker leaders. Although it shares Homenet Thailand's concerns as regards the realization of decent work for workers in the informal economy, it is also engaged in promoting women's economic, social, political, and reproductive rights, as well as in preventing and addressing gender-based violence. Accessing water and electricity in the social

housing program led by PATAMABA has the effect of reducing unpaid care work. Gender awareness sessions have also borne fruit, albeit slowly. An estimated 30 percent of men in member households are said to be already engaging in child care and domestic work. (Parilla, 2019).

The experience of PATAMABA WISE in cluster-based production with local government support, can serve as a model of SSE initiatives using a multi-stakeholder approach. Aside from adhering to the principles of a democratic, transparent, and inclusive membership-based organization in the tradition of socially responsible and mission-oriented governance, it also believes in sharing responsibilities with other stakeholders, and accessing resources from the state, the private sector, academe and CSOs.

Aside from addressing the primary economic needs of the community, PATAMABA engages in recycling, environmental safety and conservation measures connected to disaster risk reduction and management, and climate change adaptation. Through awareness-raising and capability building activities, it instills edifying values such as solidarity, *damayan* (mutual aid), and *tangkilian* (supporting each other's products). Production and community-based activities of PATAMABA have given visibility and prominence to its women members who have stepped up to the challenge as empowered leaders whose private and public lives increasingly show manifestations of gender equality.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

SSE initiatives can indeed serve as pathways towards gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as other important SDGs on ending poverty and hunger, accessing water, providing decent work and sustainable livelihood, addressing climate change and its impact, forging partnerships, among others. However, the degree of success depends on how the dimensions of SSEs; i.e., socially responsible and mission-oriented governance, edifying values, products and services for social development, environmental conservation measures, and economic sustainability, are pursued and realized.

Although there are clear gains, there are also gaps which need to be addressed, as the four case studies show. When women and girls are specifically named and targeted for organizing, awareness raising and capability building, strong empowerment results, impacts, and outcomes ensue. These empowering processes have to be inclusive and sensitive to many intersecting as well as differentiating factors aside from gender, including poverty, informality, ethnicity, age, educational attainment, disability, and citizenship (in the case of migrants).

Even then, more attention needs to be paid to the intractable issue of unpaid care work, and an unfair gender division of labor which saddles women and girls with multiple burdens and prevents them from fruitfully engaging in productive work, participating in community activities, and taking on leadership roles in local governance and beyond. SSEs can offer women more and better jobs approaching decent work standards but they can do more in terms of recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work in a consistent and systematic fashion.

SSEs can advocate for "better provision of essential services, including care services; more investment in time-labour saving equipment and infrastructure services; more investment

in initiatives to shift perceptions, norms, and gender roles about care...” (IDS, IDRC, and Oxfam, 2016:4). Many case studies around the globe show that these policies and practices are effective in laying down the requisites for the economic empowerment of women and girls.

On the whole, and as pointed out in a dissertation employing case studies focused on gender and solidarity economy in the Philippines, women and men must be able to share power and decision-making not only in SSE organizations but also in the household and the larger community, including in local government and beyond. (Verceles, 2014: 53-65) Coming from a disadvantaged position, women through SSEs must gain greater access and control over resources as well as legal and social protection, and have greater visibility and voice not only as members but also as leaders.

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