

**SUMMARY REPORT**  
**Women's Studies/Gender Research Meeting**  
**Miriam College, Quezon City, Philippines**  
**25-26 July 2007**

**Prepared by Josefa Gigi Francisco, Miriam College**

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**Background and Participants**

The Women's Studies / Gender Research (WS/GR) Network was formed to mainstream and advance Women's Human Rights and Gender Equality in the programs and projects of UNESCO-Social and Human Sciences (SHS) Sector. It was established as part of the Program on Women and Gender Equality in the medium term period 2002-2007. Specifically the network will actively promote and mainstream international normative instruments on women/gender, such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as strengthen intellectual cooperation by bringing together the heads of research institutions and women's studies programs from different countries to strengthen south to south and north to south linkages in women's studies and gender research.

Miriam College in the Philippines hosted the first meeting of the WS/GR Network on 25-26 July 2007. The meeting had three objectives: first, to agree on ways and means by which network members can collaborate on the UNESCO – SHS program for gender equality and women's rights as UNESCO begins its new medium term plan (2008-2013) as well as the two year biennial program from 2008/09; second, to identify areas of collaboration among and across network members; and third, to discuss the emerging issues and trends in women's rights and gender equality with a view to furthering the work of the network.

Participating institutions from Africa, from Latin America, North America, Central America, the Arab Region, and Asia make up the WS/GR network. It is the first of its kind to involve institutions from all across the globe. Those present at the meeting were the following: Universidad de San Martin, Argentina (Graciela di Marco); Makerere University, Uganda (Tabitha Mulyampiti); National Women's Studies Association, USA (Allison Kimmich); University of South Australia, Adelaide (Suzanne Franzway); University for Peace, Costa Rica (Dina Rodriguez); Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, American Lebanese University, Lebanon (Anita Nassar); Purdue University, USA (Valentine Moghadam); and Miriam College, Philippines (Josefa (Gigi) Francisco, Aurora de Dios, and Patricia Licuanan).

Also present were Pierre Sane, Assistant Director-General of UNESCO-Social and Human Sciences (SHS) Sector and Eunice Smith, Program Specialist on Gender Equality and Development. Members of Philippine National Commission of UNESCO led by the Secretary General Preciosa Soliven likewise joined the meeting. These were: Virginia Miralao, Philippine Social Science Institute; Jose David Lapuz, Member of the International Advisory on Human

Rights and Poverty Reduction of UNESCO; Rainier Ibane, Ateneo de Manila University; and Zosimo Lee, University of the Philippines.

### **Welcome Speeches**

In her welcome speech, the Miriam College President Patricia B. Licuanan, noted: *“The Beijing+10 Review, reveals, as we might expect, gains and gaps. It also calls attention to the need to confront the systems and emerging issues that affect women. Some issues that are found in the review, I was very pleased to see, echo the programmatic themes in the UNESCO Social and Human Sciences Gender Strategy namely, Globalization and Women’s Human Rights; Culture and Gender Equality; and Gender Dynamics of Conflict, Peace-building and Post-Conflict Reconstruction; and Governance.”* Moreover she said: *“(the) Beijing review also calls attention to certain trends such as the rise of religious and ethnic fundamentalisms which tend to focus on women as the major arena of oppression. In the extreme, it is feared that motherhood, family and traditional values are endangered and even rejected in the name of gender equality and emancipation and empowerment of women.* She hoped for the network to continue addressing these issues.

Preciosa Soliven, Secretary General of the Philippine Commission of UNESCO, meanwhile, praised the collaboration between UNESCO-Paris and Miriam College as a *“cause of celebration”* and expressed her wish that gender mainstreaming will be able to enhance the lifelong learning process that *“begins from the cradle and ends at the grave.”*

Eunice Smith, Program Specialist on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, UNESCO, thanked participants for attending the meeting, extended UNESCO’s appreciation to Miriam College for agreeing to host the event and set out the Organization’s reasons for establishing the Network and the objectives of the meeting.

### **WS/GR Network in UNESCO-SHS Program Cycle: Possible Areas of Work**

Pierre Sane emphasized important role that the WS/GR member institutions can play in the new Medium Term Plan (2008-2013) of the UNESCO-SHS. He spoke of need to utilize gender research in the exploration of rights-based socially just policy and program responses to poverty, international migration, and urban development, among others. According to him, *“all program sectors would benefits from gender analysis.”* A useful aspect is to set guidelines on how research findings could be turned into policy recommendations. He also spoke of the need to develop a core curriculum guide for teaching gender studies, drawing on the expertise of university-based gender programs and institutes which are members of the network. Linked to this, he raised the question: *“how can the network contribute in setting up a department of gender in a university, what is the collective experience and what type of advise or brochure must we publish?”* Policy dialogues with researchers and agencies on the gender dimension of policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation of outcomes, are areas in which UNESCO would like the collaboration of the Network. Finally he said that it is possible for the WS/GR to work with UNESCO-SHS on any of these programs or projects either as a collective or on an individual basis.

Network members enthusiastically responded to Sane's message with various ideas and concerns. In relation to policy oriented research, a cross-cultural study of how citizenship and democracy were understood and practiced especially at the family and personal spheres was flagged as a potential project. Participants also took note of the other issues that network members were currently examining, such as, women, peace and conflict resolution and reconstructions, women's leadership and decision-making, women's participation in trade union activism, and women's rights and status in the Arab world. UNESCO-SHS included issues of ageing and international migration. Some members also expressed interest in convening various stakeholders in a dialogue-based assessment of social policies from a rights-based approach.

One highlight was an animated discussion on the idea of a developing a core curriculum on women's human rights / gender equality, an idea that drew from the remarkable achievement of UNESCO-SHS in developing a core curriculum on bioethics and human rights for teaching in medical schools. While there was some agreement that there is growing recognition on what might possibly comprise a body of knowledge or a set of core courses in women's studies programs at the undergraduate level, there was also acknowledgement of the wide range of maneuverability and diversity within and between them. Instead of guidelines and standards, the network could construct some core subjects that uphold the values and principles of international women's human rights and which may in turn be considered as part of core curricula of women's studies programs in the various countries that asked to be assisted in the development of their women's studies programs.

The network members were amenable to two modes of working with UNESCO – as individual institutions and as a collective – but also raised the desirability of working together on more academic and theoretical projects that may not be directly linked to a UNESCO program area but which nevertheless reflects the vision and principles of UNESCO-SHS. Some were interested to see how exchanges between experts and staff could be developed within the network though a mechanism of exchange while others raised the need for allocating resources toward periodic meetings as a way of sustaining the group. The possibility of generating funds through relationship among and between members in collaborative gender researches and publications was also expressed.

### **Critical Areas and Themes for Women's Studies**

**By Valentine Moghadam**

**Professor of Sociology & Women's Studies, Purdue University, USA**

This is not a shopping list; rather it is a set of interrelated propositions and proposals regarding our status and potential with regard to knowledge production and social transformations. It pertains to our roles as teachers, scholars, and activists.

1. Exploring North-South differences in conceptual frameworks, methodological approaches, and programming foci. Tendency toward postmodernism and anti-positivism in Women's Studies in Europe and North America, leading to a proliferation of highly abstract theorizing and a non-empirical approach. This is especially the case in Women's Studies programs and departments, less so within traditional departments (where, for example, a sociology graduate student might do a doctoral dissertation that entails valuable research questions, fieldwork, and an empirical

approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research methods). It seems to me that Women's Studies and gender research in the South tend to be more oriented toward what we might call real life issues – political concerns, legal and policy matters, social problems – while in the North abstract theorizing is more pronounced. Can this gap be bridged? Does it need to be?

2. Theorizing the research-policy-activism nexus in Women's Studies and exploring linkages between and among the three. Often we conduct our research, teach, undertake consultancies, engage in feminist networks and international solidarity work, and build our programs and departments without consciously or deliberately integrating the three dimensions of Women and Gender Studies. Women's Studies began as the outgrowth of second wave feminism in the 1970s, and has spread throughout the world. It was highly politicized at its inception and deeply concerned with policy issues. In the North, it became less so during the 1980s and early 1990s as a result of the influence of poststructuralist thinking. In the South, academics often encounter institutional or political constraints on public policy engagement, though this is not a problem in the more open or democratic societies of the South. In studying women's movements in the Middle East and transnational feminist networks, I have noticed a strong involvement by academics (as well as journalists and lawyers). Recently, in the United States, professional associations such as the ASA have been endorsing what is called "public sociology" and building new networks such as Sociologists Without Borders, as well as continuing a practice of sending a representative to interface with the U.S. Congress. A key question for us, therefore, is this: Through what mechanisms can Women's Studies project a stronger voice and presence on public policy issues and international affairs? Can the three dimensions of our work find their way into the curriculum, as well as in institutions such as the NWSA or this network? This question leads to my third critical area or thematic concern.

3. While various disciplines and theoretical frameworks offer deep insights into, and convincing explanations of, contemporary social issues (e.g., poverty, globalization, ethnic conflict, war, inequalities, violence), Women's Studies and gender research have generated valuable knowledge on these and other issues. In particular, gender research on issues of the construction and implications of masculinities and femininities – at micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis, using social-psychological, organizational, and structural approaches – has been especially promising. However, this research needs continued elaboration if it is to influence the traditional disciplines or the public policy centers – and if we are to better prepare those students who wish to engage with social, policy and political issues. How is "hegemonic masculinity" constructed and reinforced in the family; social organizations such as schools and the media; the military; the corporate world? How does hegemonic masculinity combine with other factors to precipitate conflict, whether inside the home, on the street, at the workplace, or in the form of war? Feminist analysis, it seems to me, has a great deal to say about masculinity and violence. But we need more cross-national, collaborative and comparative research on precisely how and where the more damaging forms of masculinity are constructed and reproduced, and how they interact with inequality and power to contribute to and perpetuate exploitation, violence, and war.

4. Women, gender and decision-making. Women's Studies has been a site of women's decision-making. As a field and a profession it has offered a home to many women scholars uncomfortable in or dissatisfied with the traditional disciplines or departments. It has helped

them gain confidence (and, often, tenure and promotion), flourish, and to move more easily into senior positions. Notwithstanding some criticisms of some programs and departments (and some of the criticisms made of some women or gender studies programs in the U.S. have been entirely justified), the field as a whole and its attendant institutions have helped advance the status of women in the academy. The new president of Harvard University, for example, is a product of both science and women's studies. Outside of academia, women have made tremendous inroads as leaders of all manner of civil society organizations – itself a source of research for many feminist scholars. Women's Studies as a success story, as a site for women's advancement, and as a producer of significant knowledge for nearly four decades, along with women's leadership in civil society, is highly suggestive of the broad contributions that women's decision-making roles in other domains could bring about. Many of us feel that enhancing women's participation and leadership across domains has many positive social and political entailments. We need research on women and decision-making in the private sector and corporate world; trade unions; and the judiciary. We already have considerable research on the broad implications of women in government and parliaments, but more is needed on women's roles in democracy-building. In the same way that three decades of women-and-development research finally convinced global policy-makers (e.g., the World Bank) to take seriously and to promote women's contributions to human development, poverty reduction, and prevention of HIV/AIDS), we need to show that democratization without women and gender is a sham and that political cultures fail to democratize when women are marginalized from decision-making.

### **Discussion on Proposals for Inter Network collaboration on women's studies programs & joint research projects**

Discussions revolved around the question: what would make this network a UNESCO network? What is it that the network needs in terms of requirements to qualify for membership to the UNESCO? It was established that the first requirement would be is to share the values of UNESCO and contribute to its mission and vision which is *“to advance knowledge standards and intellectual cooperation to facilitate social transformations conducive to the universal values of justice, freedom and human dignity.”*

Everyone agreed that the network should contribute to the implementation of the programs of UNESCO through initiatives and interventions in gender mainstreaming. A specific activity might be collaborating on the development of a methodology tool that would assist women and gender institutes to translate research findings into policy recommendations. Another would be on conducting gender audits at the national and international level of UNESCO programs, such as programs in the Social and Human Sciences Sector of UNESCO.

The second area of work with UNESCO would be the development of curricula for women's studies and gender research programs that are rights-based or informed. The network can engage collectively so as to contribute international cross-cultural inputs in the establishment of women's studies /gender research programs in universities across different countries. The network can collate systematize and widely share new knowledge about diverse ways of mainstreaming gender in education. What are new ways of analyzing and dealing with gender power relationships? What are explorations into alternative relationships?

A third area for collaboration is on the cross-national research on women's social rights. The network could explore work on a special issue of the *International Social Science Journal* where cross cultural, comparative researches may be presented. The topic which will be decided by the network members may be one of the following: analyzing the existence of a feminist voice in public policy and international relations; a review of women's studies and its construction across different cultures and regions; issues of democratization of families, citizenship and masculinities; women in the Arab world; and examining gender relations in the management of social movements.

The need for a portal for the WS/GR Network was responded to positively when the National Women's Studies Association (USA) offered to set up the web page or help set it up if and when UNESCO provides a portal.

### **Discussion on Organizational Matters**

A major clarification concerned what the network was at this stage of its inception. It was understood that the WS/GR Network was a UNESCO affiliated network that is still in search of its institutional identity and mature developmental character. People were more comfortable with an understanding of a network as an association with no formal membership but comprised of institutions that are linked together at the working level, in a way that reflects solidarity, mutual support, and collaboration with UNESCO.

Notwithstanding, there was recognition of the need for the new network to be truly representative of the members of UNESCO at the international level. The network members thus resolved to invite new member institutions from the following countries/regions: Brazil, China, French-speaking Africa, French Speaking Canada, Scandinavia, Central Asia, Spain and one country from Eastern Europe.

Miriam College agreed to accept the role of co-coordinator to see through the initialization of the UNESCO WS/GR network during the biennial period of 2008-09. Within this period, UNESCO will provide funds for the WS/GR network but it is also clear that the network might have to conduct its own fundraising for generating resources outside what UNESCO can provide. Adjustments will also have to be made in terms of fund allocation for individual members of the network who may be involved in very specific programs in UNESCO in addition to funds already allocated for network-level collaboration. Funds to support the next network meeting in 18 months will also be set aside.