

# The Women and Development Program (WDP), 1988 - 1998:

## The Women and Development Program (WDP) - HER BEGINNING STORY

1984 - 1991

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The year 1988 was a propitious time for women's studies. *That year, the Women and Development Program (WDP) of the College of Social Work and Community Development was born.* The program aims to "provide a holistic and comprehensive perspective to the study of women and development particularly in the context of the Third World and the Philippines" (WDP Brochure 1988).

### How do we tell the story of a program?

We can start by mentioning the over-all climate for women in the 1980's: The United Nations (UN) International Decade for Women, Nairobi and the Forward-Looking Strategies. We can begin with an overview of the political situation spanning 1985-1987 - the last years of Marcos rule - and the ascendance of the first Filipina woman president, Cory Aquino.

It was only with the end of the *Decade for Women* and the rapidly growing critically feminist consciousness which emerged in the thick of the political events of the early '80s, that such developments finally encroached upon the U.P. especially in the Diliman campus, and transformed it to be well on its way to feminist awakening (Del Rosario 1990:1).

Or, we can discuss the impact of the women's movement in the Philippines on the University of the Philippines. The influences of different women's organizations like KABAPA, the Women's Research Collective, Makibaka, Gabriela, Pilipina, Kalayaan, KMK, Makamasa, Samakana, the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, FLOW, and so on.

The country was awakening to the plight of the Filipina, as rural and urban women continued their individual and organized struggles for women's equality, other rights, and women's liberation since the late sixties.

From the time the Samahang Progresibo ng mga Kababaihang Pilipina (SPKP) and its offshoot, the Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina (KABAPA) - both basically rural women's organizations - were organized, and that of MAKIBAKA (a woman's organization formed in U.P. as an offshoot of student activism and budding militant feminism which had opted to go underground), **"we will hear only lonely feminist U.P. voices in literature, some references to women in research, and isolated pioneer struggles in organizing around women's issues in community development, and in the popularization of the law"** (Del Rosario 1990:1).

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# A Decade of Looking Back; A Time for Looking Forward

Not surprisingly, the WDP's main adherents were

faculty who have already had working links with grassroots women's organizations outside the academe - women teachers and researchers with grassroots organizational and field research. Some had prepared the **NGO Philippine Women's Research Collective's Philippine Alternative Report on the Impact of the Decade of Women** presented during the International Women's Conference in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. From 1983 up until 1988, we will witness a proliferation of researches and writings on Filipino women's situation given impetus by the activities focusing on the promotion of the UN Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (Del Rosario 1990:1).

More particularly, we can zero in on the College of Social Work and Community Development, and more specifically, on the Department of Community Development, from which emanated the germinating idea, the hard work, the core group of WDP advocates, and the majority of implementers of the future *Women and Development Program* (WDP).

Previous to the creation of the WDP, a course was offered by the Department of Community Development between 1984-86, to test the reception of students to women's studies, and to firm up the preparations for a full-blown program.

This course was Community Development (CD) 224 - Seminar in Community Development Practice I, temporarily re-titled: ***Women and Community Development***. This graduate level course emphasized study areas on the following diverse topics:

History of Women's Organizations; Organizing Among Rural and Urban Women; Situationer on Filipino Women; and, Perspectives and Approaches to Women's Issues and Problems. Other topics were Women, Marriage and the Family; Women and Media; Feminist Perspectives; Effects of Global Restructuring on Women; Organizing Women; Presentations of Feminine

Creativity; Women's Studies; the Women's Movement Today; The Filipina in History; Women Workers; Women, Children and Health; and Women in Other Countries (*Official documents of the Department of Community Development, 1985 and 1986*).

In 1987, a Committee on Women's Studies was created at the CSWCD level to initiate the moves toward the proposal of a new program to the University Curriculum Committee. It convened numerous meetings, spearheaded the roundtable series "Kuro-Kuro Ukol sa Kababaihan", organized an interdisciplinary summer workshop to develop syllabi for the new program in 1988, and sponsored a seminar on feminist theories in the summer of 1989.

***The first women's studies program to be offered was a Diploma in Women and Development in the academic year of 1988-89. This later expanded to the offering of a Master of Arts in Women and Development as well.***

To be more specific, we could also mention the personae who worked to create the program - U.P. Diliman faculty, most of whom had working links with grassroots women's organizations outside the academe:

- Rosario Del Rosario, first proponent of the idea of a women's studies program, coordinator of the initial CD seminar course on women, core Women's Committee coordinator and chairperson, first coordinator of the Women and Development Program from 1988 up until 1991, and teacher in the Women and Development Program (WDP);
- Amaryllis Torres, morale booster, active member of the Women's Committee, and teacher in WDP;
- Sylvia Guerrero, CSWCD Dean, staunch supporter of the program proposal in the upper echelons of the university bureaucracy, and teacher in WDP;
- Josefina Pineda, subsequent supportive CSWCD Dean;

- Esther Viloría, CSWCD College Secretary who gave moral support and active defense of the program proposal at the Board of Regents' deliberations;
- Rosalinda Pineda-Ofreneo, although then a Law Center researcher, was invited as a resource person for the initial women's course, and became an active supporter of the idea to promote the creation of the program. She was later invited to join the new WDP as a regular faculty, and subsequently, became its third coordinator;
- Luz Rodriguez, Department of Social Work faculty, and active member of the Women's Committee;
- Elmer Ferrer, who was Chairperson of the Department of Community Development when some of its faculty decided to undertake the revolutionary move;
- Theresa Tungpalan, subsequent supportive DCD chairperson;
- Maureen Pagaduan, one of the first teachers of the new WDP courses, member of the Women's Committee, and later, second WDP coordinator;
- Proserpina Tapales, Thelma Kintanar, Alma Fernandez, U.P. Diliman faculty from other colleges, also actively supported the creation of the WDP and helped advocate, together with the WDP faculty, for the establishment of the University Center for Women's Studies (UCWS) and the Women Studies Association of the Philippines (WSAP);
- Other U.P. Diliman faculty like Malou Camagay, Carol Anonuevo, Susan Magno, Judy Sevilla, Rosario Ballescás and others who became resource persons;
- Non-U.P. personalities like Rina Jimenez David, Penny Azarcon dela Cruz, Mara Lanot, Wilhelmina Orozco, Jeanne Ilo, Virginia Miralao, Josefa Francisco, Jurgette Honculada, Mercy Fabros-Lactao, Remy Rikken, and many others, who became resource persons and active supporters of the WDP; and,
- Members of urban and rural women's organizations like the KABAPA, Gabriela, Federation of Free Workers (FFW), LMLC Women's Committee, SKMP, TUCP Women's Desk, KMK, Pilipina, Women's Resource and Research Center (WRRC), Amihan, Samakana, Makamasa, Kalayaan, WEDPRO, and many others, who enthusiastically welcomed and actively supported the WDP.



Of course, the path to the new program was not smooth. ***A good herstory would have to talk about the problems as well.***

It was easy enough to conceptualize it and put it down in organized manner on paper. The University Curriculum Committee in general was quite receptive, with the exception of some male skeptics.

The main resistance came from administrators. It is probably rare for a Program to have to be discussed on several occasions in meetings with the U.P. president, all the way up to the President's Advisory Council and the Board of Regents. *But that is what happened to the WDP.* The Women's Committee of the CSWCD had to rewrite its proposal several times, rehearse its defense carefully, and come in full force to presentation meetings. The advocacy of supporters within and outside the university helped (through letters and telegrams of encouragement and praise) put pressure on the U.P. administration.

*In fact, the program was launched without any faculty item to its name. It had to function on borrowed teachers and a coordinator from the Department of Community Development. Its first coordinator had to fight for equal treatment in terms of benefits, the latter of which were later reduced and altogether withdrawn. Several years after its launching, the subsequent coordinators had to do the same.*

The WDP was, therefore, not imposed from above. ***It was not a policy decision. It had to force policymakers to make teaching women's studies a policy in the university.***

It was born of the gender and feminist awareness of many women and some men, resulting from lessons learned from past resistance and active struggles to liberate women from colonial and patriarchal domination; lack of freedom of expression and choice; harassment; oppression; and isolation.

It came from the need to discuss, study, and promote feminist discourses aiming to free women and the feminine from humiliating, painful, threatening, and impoverishing conditions.

We can say that the creation of the WDP was, from the start, up to the present, encased in struggle, and is part and parcel of our collective struggles as Filipinas and Filipinos.

***The road to the creation and maintenance of the program, has, by no means, been a bed of roses. Its continued existence, however, makes it possible for a thousand flowers to bloom.***

Last but not least, we have to mention the WDP students, who continue to inspire the program and be its *raison d'être*.

They dared risk their futures by embarking upon a field of study hitherto unknown. The quality of their scholastic endeavor, creativity and productivity is reward enough for all the hard work, rebuff, disappointments, and heart aches we all had to go through to assert the right of women's studies to exist.

In teaching women specific courses, we in the WDP normally talk about ourselves and each other as students, workers, mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, colleagues, friends, and, if there are male students, as men as well. **We believe that knowledge of self is crucial in understanding the woman question.**

The students are not immediately always comfortable to talk about themselves. They may have an initial reluctance due to fear, shyness, or culture. Soon enough, however, our personal getting-to-know-you-and-self sessions become the initial knowledge pool for inspirational bonding, take-off, and analysis.

The students' boundless enthusiasm for new ideas and ways; their sisterhood and solidarity with each other and others; their sincere and deep-seated humanity, well reflect the WDP philosophy, and underscores the feeling that it was well worth the birthing pangs. It is the students who continue to sustain the program's life force.

The inspired thoughts of one of them best speaks for their quality of personhood and commitment:

*To my dear sister:  
with whom a new world shall  
be recreated*

*Where men and women  
Stand equally before each other  
And with one another  
Combat poverty and prejudice*

*'tis a difficult journey  
of proving one's earnestness  
in the midst of militancy*

*Of planting seeds in various  
gardens  
So that lavender flowers may bloom  
With fragrance which can liberate  
humankind.*