

## **Gender Awareness and Sensitivity – The Focus of the CA-GAD Focal Point**

By: Atty. Eden R. Raborar

*(Published in the June-December, 2010 issue of The CA Journal, Vol. XII, No.2, p.32)*

The Court of Appeals Committee on Gender and Development Focal Point (CA-GAD Focal Point) was created by virtue of OFFICE ORDER No. 104-07-RTR pursuant to the Department of Budget and Management, National Economic and Development Authority and National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women's Joint Circular No. 2004-1 dated April 5, 2004.

The CAD-GAD Focal Point was first organized in 2007 with Justice Josefina Guevara-Salonga as chairperson. Presently, the Committee is chaired by Justice Priscilla J. Baltazar-Padilla and co-chaired by Justice Marlene Gonzales-Sison. Its Vice-Chairperson is Justice Isaias P. Dicdican and his Co-Vice-Chairperson is Justice Rodil V. Zalameda. The Committee's membership is made up of the Clerk of Court – Atty. Teresita R. Marigomen; ACAE President – Mr. Amiel C. De Vera; Personnel Chief – Ms. Juanita Tibayan-Castro; Budget Representative – Ms. Virginia C. Velacruz; Office of the Presiding Justice's Representative – Ms. Liza Regala; its Secretary – Ms. Rhodora L. Bautista; and Documentors – Ms. Elizabeth Sorianosos, Ms. Alda Floria and Ms. Kereen R. Vasquez.

To facilitate its functions and activities, the Committee is divided into four sub-committees, to wit: 1) Seminar-Workshop Committee – headed by Justice Priscilla J. Baltazar-Padilla; 2) Health and Welfare Program Committee – headed by Justice Marlene Gonzales-Sison; 3) Livelihood Committee – headed by Justice Rodil V. Zalameda; and 4) Other Concerns and Activities Committee – headed by Justice Isaias P. Dicdican.

With its **VISION – “A Court of Appeals that recognizes, respects, fulfills, and protects the equal and inalienable rights of men and women who are in search of justice that is swift, fair and judicious and likewise responsive to the needs of all its employees.”**, the CA-GAD Focal Point under the active stewardship of its current chairperson, Justice Baltazar-Padilla, is soaring high in the achievement of gender equality among court personnel in terms of opportunities for training, development, promotion and advancement.

To this end, the Committee has adopted the following CORE STRATEGIES that would fully insure gender awareness and sensitivity among court personnel which in the long run would build the foundation for a gender sensitive work environment in the judiciary. These core strategies are the following: 1) information dissemination and awareness building; 2) research and documentation of the decisions on gender related cases, gathering of gender-responsive database, and

review of policies on equality and non-discrimination; 3) partnership building and networking; 4) promotion of the use of gender-fair language, core gender messages and rituals for higher gender awareness; and 5) resources mobilization.

To implement these core strategies, the Committee conducts seminar-workshops on gender sensitivity and relevant laws, promotes and advocates the use of gender-fair language in court, pushed for the creation of the Committee on Decorum and Investigation (CODI) in Manila as well as in the court satellite stations in Cebu City and Cagayan de Oro and sponsors livelihood as well as health and welfare programs.

As its launching activity, the Committee sponsored a Two-Day Intensive Training Seminar on Gender Sensitivity and Awareness on November 29-30, 2007 for its officers and members aimed at preparing them for their task of fostering gender sensitivity and awareness in the Court.

In 2008, the Committee conducted a Gender Orientation Seminar for Court Officials and Employees on May 27, 2008 and a Planning Workshop on Gender Related Activities on August 23-25, 2008.

In line with its continuing campaign for gender awareness and sensitivity, in 2009, a series of seminars and training workshops on gender orientation and sensitivity was sponsored by the Committee for the non-lawyer employees of the Court. A film showing was also held to better illustrate gender issues in relation to moral and social values. The Committee had also ventured in livelihood trainings with the assistance of other government agencies like the Department of Science and Technology (DOST).

For this year (2010), the CA-GAD Focal Point is persistently working to further the court employees' growing awareness on gender sensitive issues and development to succeed in attaining gender equality and a gender responsive working environment. The Committee continues to sponsor seminar-workshops on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), gender sensitivity and sexual harassment for lawyers and non-lawyers in its Manila, Cebu and Cagayan de Oro Stations. So far, two seminar-workshops have been held for CA Manila lawyers and one for CA Cebu City personnel, both lawyers and non-lawyers. Another one is coming-up for CA Manila non-lawyers which will take place on October 7 to 8, 2010. The CA-GAD has also scheduled such seminar-workshop for CDO staff which will be conducted from November 4 to 5, 2010.

Livelihood seminars and health care programs are also being advanced by

the CA-GAD Focal Point as part of its drive to promote economic empowerment and health awareness and wellness among the Court employees, both male and female.

The CA-GAD previously sponsored trainings on soap-making, mango product processing, detergent and fabric conditioner production and jewelry-making. The next livelihood project will be on basic automotive trouble-shooting mechanics.

Free pap smear check-up was given to the Court's interested female workers. A seminar on prostate cancer and free prostate screening were given on September 23, 2010.

It can be easily discerned from the foregoing projects and activities of the CA-GAD Focal Point that the said committee does not only cater to women's concerns, interests and needs. As repeatedly stressed by its chairperson, Justice Priscilla J. Baltazar-Padilla, gender sensitivity and development connote gender equality. An excerpt from the welcome remarks she delivered at the last seminar-workshop for CA Manila lawyers held on September 9 to 10, 2010 is quoted hereunder –

*“Many equate gender-sensitivity and gender responsiveness to feminism. This is an erroneous notion. To be gender-sensitive and gender-responsive does not mean to be feminist. The call is for us to accord equal rights and chances to all, regardless of sex.*

*The wrong notion is not at all surprising. The same is founded on the historical fact that for the longest time, women were not able to enjoy rights and avail of resources and opportunities which were then regarded as exclusive to men. Women had fought many battles to better their condition and uplift their lives, vis-a-vis the male members of the community. Their fierce struggle had paid off but it cannot be denied that there is a lot more to achieve and work for. While many laws are now in place aimed at protecting women's rights and interests, the latest of which is Republic Act 7190 or the Magna Carta for Women, one undisputed and sad fact is that discrimination and inequality still do exist in the different sectors of our society. It is in acknowledgment of this reality that many still wrongly think that gender-sensitivity and gender-responsiveness mean feminism.*

*xxx gender-sensitivity and gender-responsiveness mean providing equal opportunities for men and women ensuring equal access not only to resources, but to benefits and services as well xxx.”*

While women empowerment is part and parcel of the CA-GAD's goal, the same is not geared to make them rise higher than the male members of the society but rather to make them co-equal partners of men in nation-building.