

GENDER & ELECTIONS

MAIDEN ISSUE

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF COMELEC'S GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT - FOCAL POINT SYSTEM

MARCH 2015 - MARCH 2017



CONTENTS

- 4** Developing GAD Policies for a Gender-Sensitive and Socially Inclusive Philippine Election
- 6** COMELEC celebrates Int'l Women's Day, holds nationwide registration for women, girls
- 6** In action: COMELEC's GAD Policy Studies Group
- 8** *#BilangBabae* in Philippine Elections
- 13** Why Women Don't Run for Public Office
- 15** *Women in Elections:* Seminar on increasing women's political participation
- 16** Enriching the Gender and Elections Discourse
- 17** COMELEC holds lecture series on gender and election
- 19** The role of establishing gender quota in PH gender mainstreaming
- 20** 50-50 Gender Equality Forum and Stakeholders' Consultation
- 21** Fora on Gender and Election-Related Violence
- 22** GAD-FPS activities to mainstream gender in COMELEC
- 22** COMELEC forms CODI for main office, reg'l offices
- 23** COMELEC election officials undergo gender sensitivity training
- 24** GAD-FPS holds talk on VAW
- 25** MOVE-COMELEC Chapter launched
- 26** Gender and Development (GAD)-Focal Point System (FPS)
- 27** Proposed 2017-2022 GAD Strategic Priorities
- 29** Reflections on Gender Equality in the Philippines

GENDER&ELECTIONS

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF COMELEC'S GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT-FOCAL POINT SYSTEM

EDITORIAL BOARD

Ma. Rowena V. Guanzon
Commissioner
Head, GAD-FPS Executive Committee
ADVISER

Esmeralda Amora-Ladra
Director IV, Planning Department
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Maria Victoria S. Dulcero
Acting Director III, Planning Department
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Damcelle Torres-Cortes
UP Los Baños College of Public Affairs and Development
CONTENT EDITOR

Aletheia G. Canubas
UP Los Baños College of Development Communication
Ricarda B. Villar
UP Los Baños College of Development Communication
EDITORS

Ricarda B. Villar
LAYOUT ARTIST

The *Gender & Elections Magazine* is produced by the Gender and Development (GAD) - Focal Point System (FPS) of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC).

No part of this magazine may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means stored in a database or retrieval system without prior consent. All rights reserved.

The COMELEC GAD-FPS is located at the 8th Floor, Office of Commissioner Rowena V. Guanzon at the Palacio del Gobernador Bldg. in General Luna St., Intramuros, Manila 1002. (+632) 521-4944.

MESSAGE



We are pleased to publish the first Commission on Elections (COMELEC) *Gender and Elections Magazine*. We thank the Gender and Development - Focal Point System led by Commissioner Ma. Rowena V. Guanzon, who together with our senior officers and employees, have pursued various projects and initiatives focused on promoting gender sensitivity and equality within and outside the Commission.

In 2016, we initiated a project that allowed heavily pregnant women, together with persons with disabilities and senior citizens, to vote in accessible polling places at the ground floor of voting centers. At the same time, the Commission also partnered with local government units to ensure that daycare centers are open during the day of the national elections so that mothers could vote without worrying about their toddlers. All these were conscious efforts on the part of the Commission to help women voters participate during elections.

In terms of our efforts to make our workforce more gender sensitive, the Commission has consistently conducted trainings and seminars that aim to ensure that our employees have the proper disposition and attitude in relation to gender in handling any matter before the Commission.

Indeed, we are proud to say that we continuously look for innovative ways to ensure that we are able to cater to the unique needs of specific types of voters as we move toward a more inclusive, voter-centered elections. This CAD magazine is our way to connect with our public and showcase our best practices in respect of CAD.

Mabuhay po tayong lahat!


J. ANDRES D. BAUTISTA
Chairman
Commission on Elections



THE COMMISSION EN BANC



J. ANDRES D. BAUTISTA
Chair



CHRISTIAN ROBERT S. LIM
Commissioner



AL A. PARREÑO
Commissioner



LUIE TITO F. GUIA
Commissioner



ARTHUR D. LIM
Commissioner



MA. ROWENA V. GUANZON
Commissioner



SHERIFF M. ABAS
Commissioner

MESSAGE



Our mandate in the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) goes beyond the routine administration of elections. Our work also involves the critical task of upholding democratic processes so that all citizens can fully participate in elections and consequently, nation-building. This is why we take serious efforts to ensure that elections are not only free, orderly, honest, peaceful and credible but also gender-responsive and socially-inclusive – as articulated in the COMELEC vision.

This maiden issue of the *Gender and Elections Magazine* seeks to share such efforts. We impart how our Gender and Development (GAD) - Focal Point System (FPS) has evolved to be a dynamic catalyst of gender equality within and outside the Commission. While the limited pages cannot capture all accomplishments, we are proud to feature significant policies, studies, activities, as well as valuable partners gained in mainstreaming gender in elections for the past two years. We managed to complete these through the unwavering dedication and collaborative action of the GAD-FPS, our election officers and personnel from various parts of the country, and election stakeholders.

This publication will also reveal the reality that our efforts to promote gender equality are still far from ideal. Only one in five elected officials in the country are women although more than half of our voters (51.6 %) are females. In the House of Representatives, only 86 out of 292 members are women, and in the Senate only 6 out of 24. We hope Congress and the Commission on Elections can create mechanisms to ensure that women have a fair chance of getting elected. Hence, this issue also presents key challenges and proposed reforms to increase women's political participation.

It is timely that we launch this magazine during Women's Month when gender issues receive special attention. We hope that through this magazine, we can inspire you to join our continued advocacy for gender-responsive and socially-inclusive elections.

Maraming salamat!

MA. ROWENA AMELIA V. GUANZON

Commissioner
Head, Executive Committee
Gender and Development-Focal Point System

Developing GAD Policies for Gender-Sensitive and Socially Inclusive Philippine Elections

by Atty. Damcille Torres-Cortes, Gender and Development Consultant
(University of the Philippines Los Baños, College of Public Affairs and Development)

No less than the Commission on Elections (COMELEC)'s vision-mission statement articulates the importance of gender in elections. In its Strategic Plan 2017 Onwards that was approved by the Commission en banc, the Commission envisions itself to be

“an Election Management Body that is independent; voter-centered and competent; [and] conducting free, orderly, honest, peaceful, credible, gender-sensitive, and socially inclusive elections, in active partnership with election stakeholders.”

The Strategic Plan identified inclusiveness as one of the Commission's nine guiding principles. As explained in the plan, inclusiveness emphasizes the provision of equal access and opportunity for political representation and participation to all members of the country's voting population

without discrimination based on “race, color, sexual orientation, gender identity, sector, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property or other status.”

Explicit recognition of gender in the COMELEC's vision and plan lends immense support for the annual formulation and implementation of the GAD Plan and Budget that provides basis for holding various activities to promote gender rights among the COMELEC's internal and external stakeholders. It also reinforces the previous GAD policies and initiatives within the agency.

MORE GAD POLICIES

The COMELEC has enacted at least 53 GAD-related policies advocating for a more gender-responsive and socially-inclusive elections since the establishment of its Gender and Development (GAD) - Focal Point System (FPS) in 2012.



Members of the Parañaque City COMELEC staff assist women registrants during the Special Satellite Registration for Women and Girls conducted on March 8, 2017 in partnership with the Ospital ng Parañaque together with Civitan - Parañaque Chapter. The activity is one of the simultaneous special satellite registrations organized by COMELEC throughout the country, pursuant to Minute Resolution 10175, one of the recently implemented GAD policies in COMELEC. (Photos courtesy of RAlbia-Radin)

Over the past five years, the number of GAD resolutions adopted by the Commission has grown steadily from two resolutions in 2012, 11 in 2014, 15 in 2015, 18 in 2016, and 7 resolutions to date for 2017. This steady growth in the number of GAD policies demonstrates the agency's steadfast efforts towards gender equality.

In 2012, COMELEC sowed the seeds to mainstream gender in elections through the issuance of Minute Resolution (MR) 12-0369 that established the COMELEC GAD-FPS pursuant to Executive Order (EO) No. 273 *Approving and Adopting the Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (1995-2025)*. Five years later, the Commission continues to nurture a revitalized and more aggressive approach to ensuring equal opportunities for male and female representation within the Commission and in the Philippine elections.

STARTING FROM WITHIN

With the same resolve exerted towards attaining gender equality among voters, candidates and elected officials, the COMELEC GAD-FPS is also working towards a 50-50 male-female distribution of leadership posts in COMELEC national and field offices. This is pursuant to the 50-50 gender balance in third level positions in the civil service required under the *Philippine's Magna Carta of Women* or Republic Act (RA) No. 9710.

Resolution No. 10173 or *Policy of the Commission on Gender and Equality and Gender Responsiveness* dated on February 24, 2017 seeks to operationalize the said mandate. The policy provides for “*equal employment and promotion opportunities for men and women at all levels of position*” within the Commission. It also requires equal representation of male and female personnel and officers during seminars, trainings, and other fora and in availing themselves of local and international scholarship grants and similar professional development opportunities. Resolution No. 10173 seeks to prepare more female personnel for leadership roles especially since women comprise only three out of the 28 executive managerial posts within the Commission.

In addition to Resolution No. 10173, several other resolutions of the Commission have authorized gender sensitivity trainings and staff participation in conferences and other activities that promote gender-responsiveness. These policies ensure that building internal capacity on GAD among male and female COMELEC personnel remains a continuing effort.

ENSURING GENDER SENSITIVITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSIVENESS IN COMELEC SERVICES

COMELEC puts equal premium to mainstreaming gender among its employees and the Filipino voters through a number GAD policies, one of which is Resolution No. 10110 dated May 3, 2016.

Resolution No. 10110 required all local government units including the barangay or village, city/municipal, and provincial levels to open their daycare centers from 6am to 5pm during the May 9 National Elections. This aimed to encourage more female voters to take part in the elections. Mothers and other caregivers could conveniently leave their young children in daycare while they vote.

A similar program is available for COMELEC employees in the national office. To ease the burden of personnel, especially women, saddled with child care, the Commission maintains an in-house daycare center supported through the GAD Budget. Toddler and pre-school children of staff are cared for and enjoy play school in the center for free while their parents are at work.

More recently, another resolution (Resolution No. 10175 dated February 27, 2017) called for the conduct of the voters' special satellite registration for women and girls on March 8, 2017 in celebration of the International Women's Day. Resolution No. 10175 also provided for express lanes or special queues for persons with disability, senior citizens, heavily pregnant, and indigenous women so that they can be given priority during registration.

COMELEC celebrates Int'l Women's Day, holds nationwide registration for women, girls

by Atty. Glinis U. Tamondong, Attorney VI, Election and Barangay Affairs Department
(Gender and Development Technical Working Group)

In observance of the International Women's Day (IWD), the COMELEC GAD – FPS conducted a one-day special satellite registration for women and girls on March 8, 2017.

The special satellite registration was held in 39 cities and municipalities in various parts of the country. For easy access and convenience of female registrants, the special registration was held in public places such as malls and other commercial establishments and schools. COMELEC partnered with various women's group like the Zonta Club International and the GAD Offices of the local government units (LGUs) to help in the dissemination of information and other logistical requirements.

While the GAD-FPS views the growing number of COMELEC GAD policies as a major accomplishment, the unit recognizes that it is critical to be deliberate and strategic in crafting policies on gender and elections.

It is for this purpose that the GAD-FPS organized a highly dedicated and committed group – the GAD Policy Studies Group (PSG).

In action: COMELEC's GAD Policy Studies Group

by Atty. Rona Ann V. Caritos, Gender and Development Policy Consultant



The *Public Discussion on Increasing Women's Political Participation* held on November 10, 2016 at The Bayleaf Hotel in Intramuros, Manila is one of the initiatives of the GAD Policy Studies Group towards ensuring gender responsiveness in COMELEC services.

The Commission's GAD-FPS established the Gender and Development (GAD) Policy Studies Group (PSG) as a core group of stakeholders that will study and propose legal and policy reforms to increase women's political participation.

GAD PSG's work primarily aims to explore mechanisms to increase the number of women candidates and elected officials. Secondary objectives include educating stakeholders on the need to have more women candidates and politicians, as well as creating and mobilizing a network of gender-in-election champions within and outside of COMELEC.

These external stakeholders include the country's Executive and Legislative departments, the Commission on Human Rights, political parties, party list groups, lawyer's organizations, and other concerned non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

THE I-AGREE COALITION

GAD PSG's first move was to consult various internal stakeholders from the different national departments of the Commission as well as to meet and gather support from various external stakeholders. In these meetings, GAD PSG oriented the different groups on the problem of gender inequality in the Philippine elections and political system.

GAD PSG also presented good practices that could be adopted from other countries such as the implementation of voluntary and legislated women's quota. A voluntary quota can be implemented through a COMELEC resolution through its accreditation for political parties and party list guidelines. Meanwhile, a legislated quota requires an amendment of an existing law (e.g. Party List Law) or the passage of a new law (e.g. Political Party Development Bill).

These consultation meetings gave birth to the I-AGREE (I am an Advocate for Gender Equality in Elections) coalition. The coalition is a network of gender-in-election champions composed of the various stakeholders who attended the meetings and who expressed their support for the adoption of gender quotas.

MOVING FOR POLICY REFORMS

With the coalition of gender-in-election champions, GAD PSG began discussions on crafting a possible resolution on voluntary quota, which the Commission may consider in line with its mandated election administration functions. COMELEC Commissioner Luie Tito F. Guia, Philippine Commission on Women and the Commission on Human Rights provided substantial inputs to the discussions.

Based on the discussions, GAD PSG is considering to propose the inclusion of a provision on voluntary quota in a COMELEC resolution for accreditation of political parties and party lists. This provision may include benefits to be given to political parties and party list groups if they comply with the quota. Some of the benefits initially suggested were prioritization in COMELEC consultations and the awarding of the gender equality seal which is based on a party's gender score. The assessment tool for the gender score will be made in consultation with the Philippine Commission on Women.

GAD PSG, alongside the gender-in-election champions in the I-AGREE coalition, is continuing discussions and studies on the details of the said proposal on women's quota, and on other mechanisms to encourage more women to run for public office.



#BilangBabae is an online advocacy initiative of the Philippine Commission on Women which COMELEC adopted to recognize Filipino women's participation in elections.

Bilang is a Filipino term for count, number, or figures and the act of taking on a particular role. *Babae* is the Filipino term for female/woman.

#BilangBabae in Philippine Elections

*by Atty. Damcille Torres-Cortes, Gender and Development Consultant
(University of the Philippines Los Baños, College of Public Affairs and Development)*

The Philippines ranked 7th out of 145 countries in the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Global Gender Gap Report 2016. This is the same rank as in 2015 and two notches up from being 9th in 2014. This means that the country is among the nations that score high in terms of gender equality.

WEF's ranking is based on an index that examines the gap between men and women in four key categories. The Philippines had high marks in the areas of Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, and Health and Survival. However, the Philippines did not fare as well in terms of Political Empowerment which the index measures based on the ratio of females over males with seats in the parliament, with ministerial level positions, and the number of years a female is head of state in the last 50 years.

Sex-disaggregated election data from COMELEC confirm the WEF's findings in the area of political empowerment.

NATIONAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS

In the 2016 National and Local Elections (NLE), there were slightly more female registered voters (51.6%) than male voters (48.4%). This has been a consistent trend in the past two elections (2010 and 2013). There is also a slight increase (2.13%) in the number of female registered voters in the 2016 elections compared to the 2013 elections.

In terms of whether those who registered did turn up to vote, 82.68 % of the female registered voters did vote in the 2016 NLE. Females who actually voted still outnumbered their male counterparts by 4%. In the three successive (2010, 2013, and 2016) NLE's, female voters who actually voted averaged 50.63% of the total number of voters.

The figures on female candidates and elected officials, however, is a different story from the trend of increasing women voters.

In the 2016 elections, only 19.36% of candidates for national and local positions are females compared to the almost 36,091 male candidates (80.62%). There is, however, a slight increase (1.13%) to the number of female candidates since 2004.

Compared to the high percentage of female voters, the percentage of female elected candidates from the national down to the barangay level is on average at 20%.

Out of the 8,666 female candidates for national and local political posts, only 3,849 won. From 1998 to 2016, only an average of 18.18% of female candidates win elected positions. In the Philippine House of Representatives only 85 (29%) out of 292 are female composing a third of the elected representatives while in the Senate, 6 (25%) out of the 24 members are female.

There has been a slight increase (0.89%) in the percentage of elected female candidates from 1998 to 2016. However, if nothing is done to address this, it will take a long time to achieve the 50:50 ratio of male-female elected officials in the country.

BARANGAY ELECTIONS

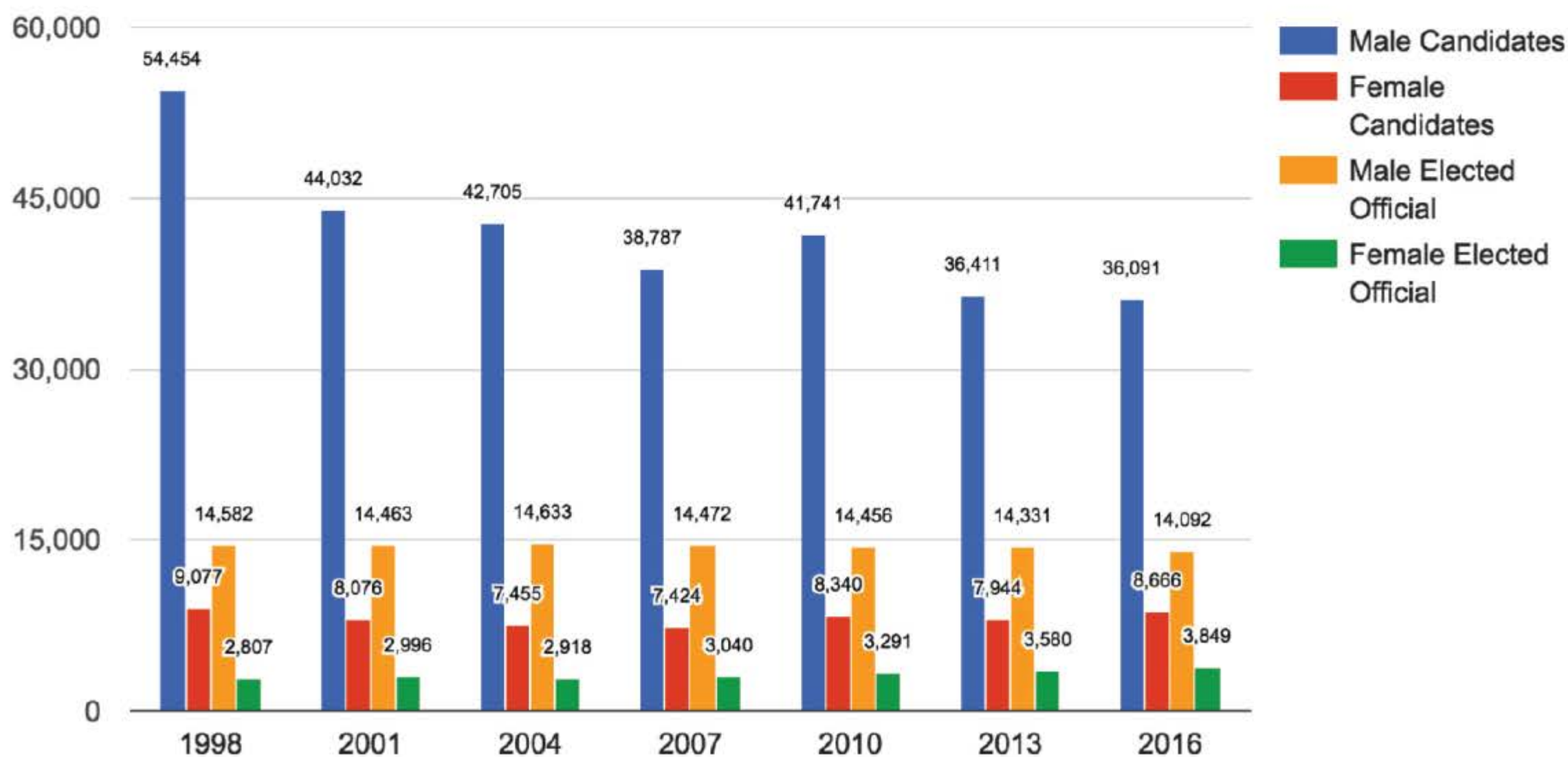
The trends in women's participation in the last barangay elections are similar to national statistics. During the 2013 Barangay Elections (BE), there were also more female registered voters (50.13%) than males (48.51%). Again, similar to the national trend, 50.63% of registered voters who turned up to vote were women. There has been a 0.74% increase in the percentage of women who actually voted from 2010 to 2013.

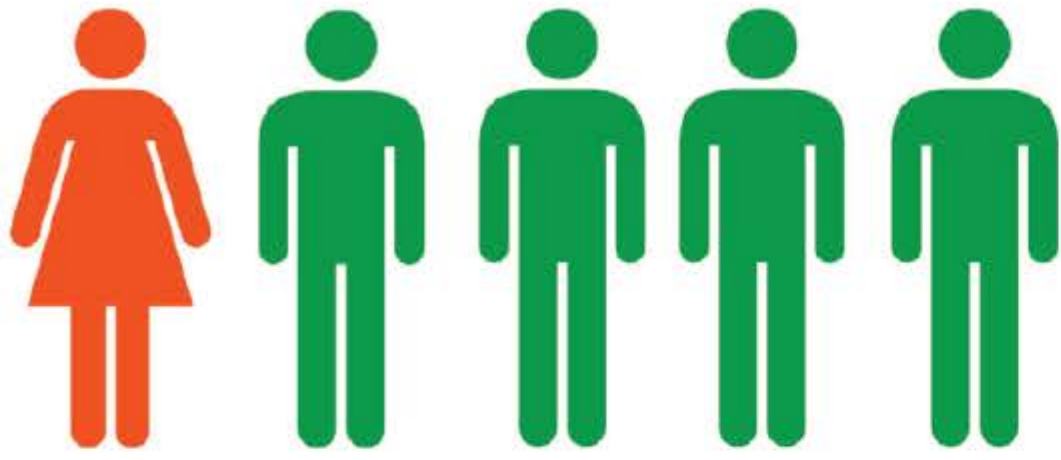
Among candidates for barangay positions, females were significantly fewer than their male counterparts. For the Barangay Captain or Chairperson or Village Chief position, women make up only 16.76% of the 94,834 candidates, and 18.47% of the 41,610 elected officials.

Data show that more women run and win as Barangay Kagawad or Village Council Members than as Barangay Captain. On average in the past three barangay elections, only 16.54% of the elected Village Chiefs were women. In contrast, 25.34% of elected council members were women.

The Barangay Kagawad or Village Council Member position is the lowest elected position in the country's governance structure.

Gender distribution of candidates and elected officials (1998-2016)

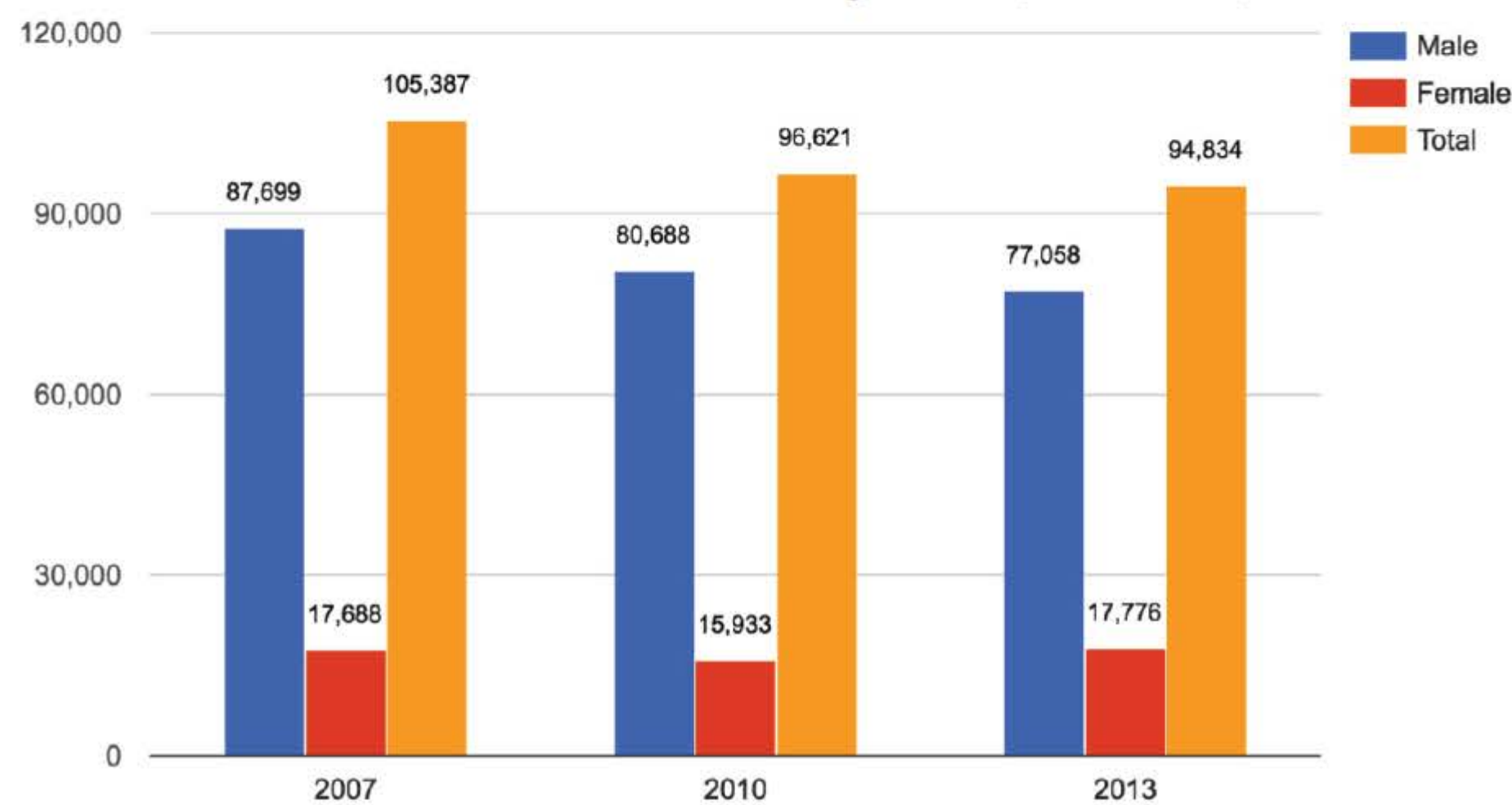




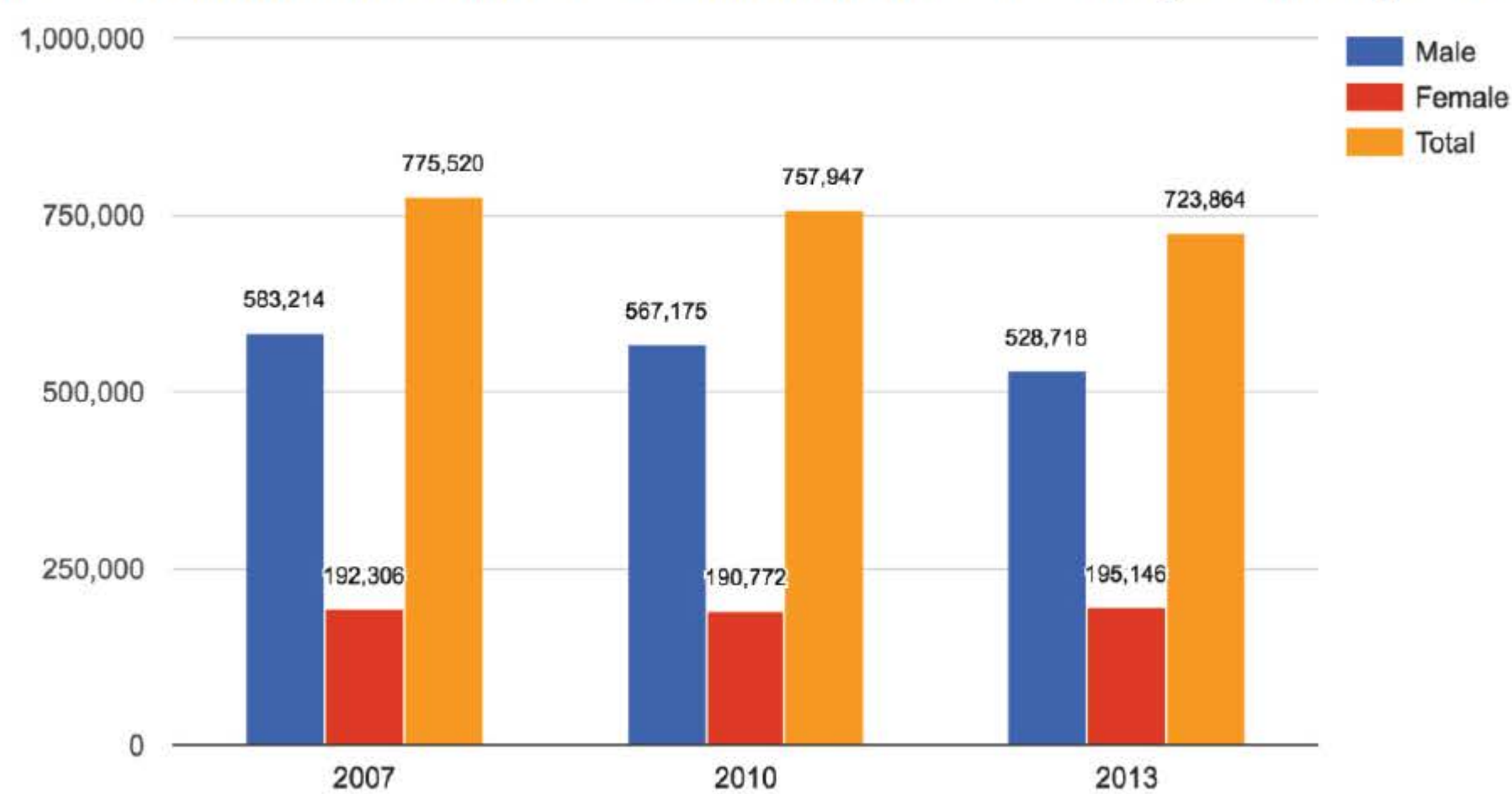
Only 1 out of 5 elected officials in the Philippines is a woman.

It is an attractive entry point for local political aspirants since each Barangay or Village elects seven council members. It is heartening to note that the bulk of women barangay officials are kagawads. In fact, in the past three elections (2007, 2010, and 2013), there has been an average increase of 2.13% in the number of female elected council members. But for the position of Village Chief, the increase in the number of elected women is only 1.41%. The reality remains that women get to fill more of the lower level elected positions only and that even at the kagawad level, men dominate electoral politics.

Gender distribution of candidates for village chief (2007-2013)



Gender distribution of candidates for members of the village council (2007-2013)



OTHER STATISTICS

Special group of voters

Illiterates and Persons with Disabilities

PWD and Illiterate registered voters are only 0.67% and 1.3%, respectively, of the total number of registered voters for the 2016 elections. However, COMELEC, with its commitment to social inclusiveness, seeks to make elections more accessible to them.

It is also worth noting that nationwide, there are slightly more male PWD registered voters (52.13%) than females (47.87%). The regions with the highest number of PWD registered voters are Regions VII (Central Visayas), VIII (Eastern Visayas), and IX (Zamboanga Peninsula). The PWD voters from the three regions make up almost a third of the total number of PWD registered voters in the Philippines. Meanwhile, NCR makes up only almost 4% of the total number of PWD registered voters. Out of the 17, seven regions had more female PWD registered voters than males.

Another special group of voters are those who are illiterate. Regions VII (Eastern Visayas), XII (SOCCSKSARGEN), and Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) have the highest number of illiterate registered voters.

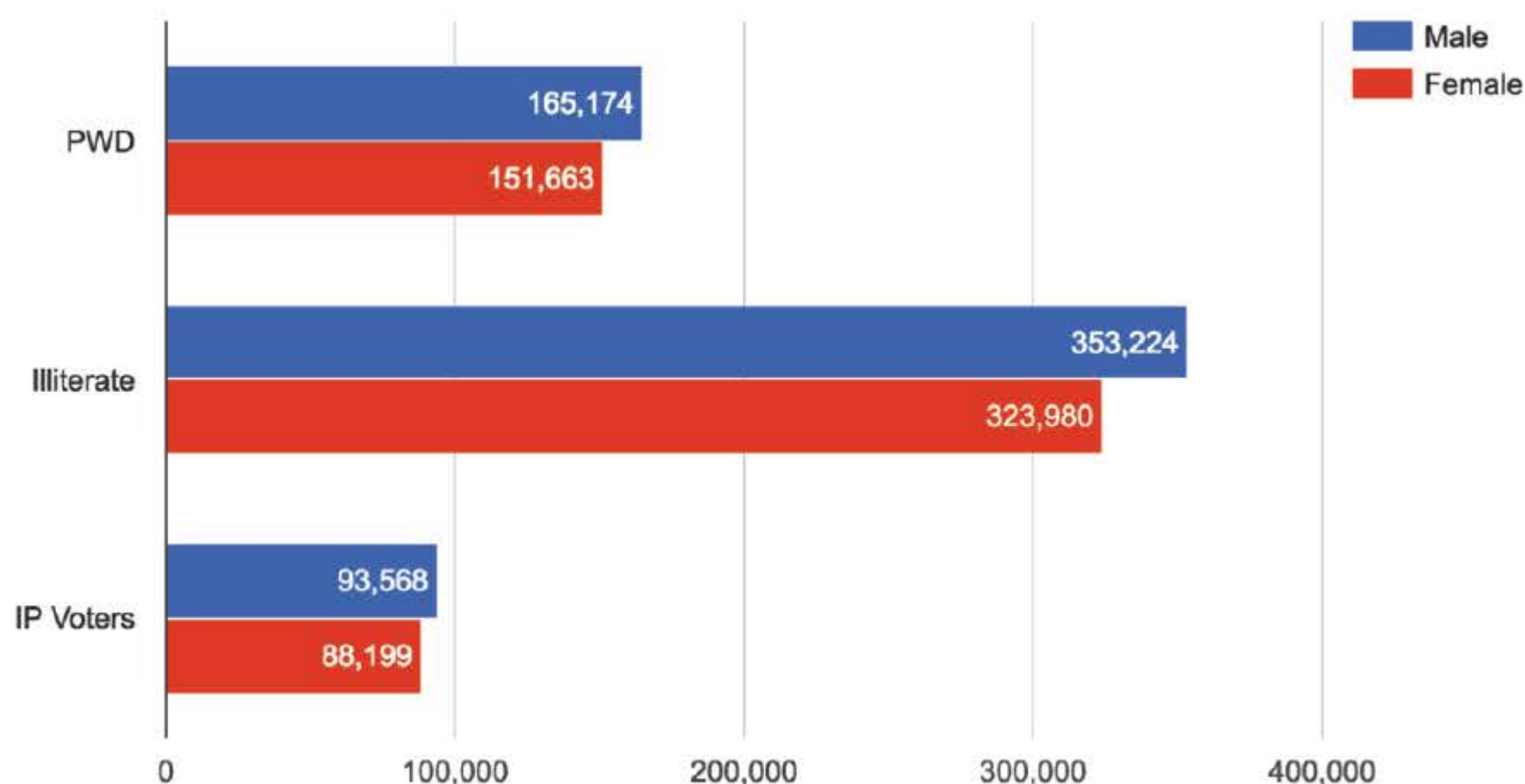
Together, they make up 41% of all illiterate registered voters in the Philippines. Of the total 677,204 registered voters who are illiterate, 52% are males. Out of the 17 regions, eight regions had more female registered voters who were illiterates. In both the National Capital Region (NCR) and ARMM, the female illiterate voters outnumbered the males by almost 15% each.

Indigenous Peoples and Overseas Filipinos

A good number of working Filipinos are employed overseas and the Commission reaches out to them so they can exercise their right of suffrage while abroad. The number of Filipinos registered via overseas voting has increased through the years. A significant hike in overseas voters can be seen during the 2016 elections. Now, there are 1,376,067 registered overseas voters. Of this number, 60% are women.

Figures show that in all four major regions worldwide, women overseas voters outnumber men. This is true in the Middle East and African Region which has the most number of combined male and female overseas registrants. The overseas posts with the highest number of female registered voters is Hong Kong, where there are a large number of Filipina workers.

Gender distribution of registered special group of voters (2016)



However, out of the more than 1.3 million overseas voter registrants in 2016, only 434,347 actually casted their votes. Women comprise the bulk of this at sixty-three percent (63%), a figure consistent with the female-male ratio of overseas registrants. Likewise, the country where the highest number of female registrants who actually voted is Hong Kong.

In the Asia Pacific and European Region, women registered higher voter turnout rates. The Middle East and African Regions had the most number of total overseas registrants, however, the voter turnout of women was lower than that of men. Probable factors that could affect these numbers include mobility of citizens within or across regions and other region-specific concerns.

Voters per Region

Among the country's regions, Region IV-A or CALABARZON (4 million), the National Capital Region or NCR (3.4 million), and Region III or Central Luzon (3.1 million) have the highest number of female registered voters. Regions with slightly less female registered voters than males are Cordillera Autonomous Regions (CAR), Regions VIII (Eastern Visayas) and XII (SOCCSKARGEN), Region XIII (CARAGA Administrative Region), and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Voters' Civil Status

In terms of the voters' civil status, there are more single male registered voters across the country, except in NCR where there are slightly more (3.8%). Nationwide, on average, there are 7.6% more single males than female registered voters.

Among married, widowed, or legally separated registered voters, females outnumber the males. There are 10% more female married registered voters and 20% more legally separated female registered voters nationwide. The large difference is among the widowers, where 8 out of 10 widowed registered voters are females.



/STUDY/ Why Women Don't Run for Public Office

*by Atty. Damcelle Torres-Cortes,
Gender and Development Consultant
(University of the Philippines Los Baños,
College of Public Affairs and Development)*

Why don't women run for public office? This was among the key questions that COMELEC GAD-FPS sought to answer through a survey on barriers to women's political participation among selected candidates, party members, and campaign supporters.

The study had a total of 501 respondents composed of 303 females and 198 males. They were among the participants of the COMELEC GAD-FPS Fora held from March to April 2016 in Cotabato City, Zamboanga City, Bacolod City, Tagbilaran City, and Siargao. The attendees were

mostly candidates, party members, and campaign supporters; hence survey respondents are considered politically-active election participants (and not ordinary person-on-the-street subjects).

Based on the study, women and men agree that females are competent for public office. However, the same respondents do not maintain an equally strong belief that women should run for and be elected to political office. Simply put, respondents say that yes, women can serve but should not necessarily occupy elected posts. This disparity in perception is reflected in election statistics.

COMELEC data show that while females comprise more than half of the registered and actual voters, women occupy only around 21% of the total national and local elected seats.

When asked specifically why women do not seek elected posts, survey respondents pointed to women's capacity to serve in public office as a primary concern. The topmost reasons identified were that women do not have the necessary confidence, skills, leadership experience and interest in political office. These findings may seem to contradict the respondents' position that women can serve as elected officials. But the next set of responses to why women do not run may provide an explanation.

Limited support, as well as negative perceptions about women, constitute a second layer of barriers to women's political participation based on the survey. Women do not vie for public office because they do not have sufficient campaign funds, expansive political networks and support from political parties. Religion and family members also discourage women from running. Prevailing notions that politics is a man's world and that voters consider women to be less qualified candidates further dissuade women from competing as candidates.

It appears that there is a recognition of women's potential to exercise political leadership, but it was mostly the female respondents who acknowledge this. From among those surveyed, females were more convinced than males that women are capable political leaders and that more women should be elected. But such potential remains a mere latent resource because of the existing view, policies, and practices that favor men in politics.

What then will make more women run?

Consistent with the identified obstacles, survey respondents indicated the need for various forms of support, listed below:

-  **Trainings, not only on political leadership when they get to office, but also on how to campaign and win elections**
-  **Concrete mechanisms such gender quotas within parties and in elected seats, coupled with the creation of more political parties and women's support networks**
-  **Support from the media and protection from election-related violence also surfaced as critical factors that could encourage women to seek public office.**

Results of the COMELEC GAD-FPS survey confirm the need for electoral reforms to enable women to equitably take an active part in the democratic process. Various international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Beijing Platform for Action uphold the equitable representation of women in decision-making and political processes.

The Philippines' own Magna Carta of Women specifically mandates the provision of *"incentives to political parties with women's agenda"* and encourages *"the integration of women in their leadership hierarchy internal policy-making structures, appointive, and electoral nominating processes."* Beyond legal compliance, research studies prove that electing women to government posts leads to more socially-relevant policies and greater appreciation of women's role in society.

Through the GAD-FPS, the COMELEC has initiated various initiatives to enable more women to run for elections as part of the COMELEC's commitment to gender-responsive and socially inclusive elections. These include policy studies and discussions with internal and external stakeholders to look into suggested mechanisms such as gender quotas, as well as seminars on election laws for women candidates.

Women in Elections: Seminar on increasing women's political participation

*Atty. Abigail Claire Carbero-Llacuna, Attorney VI, Law Department
(Member, GAD Technical Working Group)*

To build women's capacity to vie for elected positions, GAD-FPS launched a series of lecture seminars targeting female political aspirants all over the country in preparation for the National and Local Elections of 2016.

On September 3, 2015, COMELEC organized a roundtable discussion at Bayleaf Intramuros in Manila. COMELEC Commissioner Ma. Rowena V. Guanzon, head of the commission's GAD-FPS Executive Committee, emphasized the need to encourage more women to take part in the elections as voters and more importantly as female candidates. This is to ensure that men and women enjoy the same rights and opportunities in public office.

From this roundtable discussion, a series of nationwide seminars on increasing the participation of women in elections was initiated.

COMELEC spearheaded the series of lecture seminars to encourage more women candidates to run in the 2016 elections. The lecture series entitled "Women and Elections" focused on three key topics, namely: (1) rules on the filing of certificate of candidacy, (2) electoral campaign rules including the prohibited activities during election period; and (3) rules regarding the Statement of Contributions and Expenditures (SOCE), a legal requirement for candidates (except for elective barangay or village office).

The first leg of the lecture series was launched in August and September 2015 at the National Capital Region in the cities of Quezon, San Juan, and Taguig. The provinces of Zambales, Iloilo, Cebu, Negros Oriental, and Bukidnon served as the venue for the succeeding lecture series.

In October 2015, COMELEC GAD FPS actively engaged in conducting the lectures simultaneously in different provinces of the remaining fifteen (15) regions.

Women from different walks of life participated in the seminars. Lawyers from the COMELEC Law Department including Atty. Shemidah G. Cadiz, Atty. Gwyn Calibuyot, Atty. Akia A. Co II, Atty. Renel B. Tatlonghari, and Atty. Joseph Vega served as resource persons for the lecture series. Lawyers from the Campaign Finance Office such as Atty. Sabino Mejarito and Atty. Frances Morales-Paredes also took part in the event.



Senator Pia Cayetano with Commissioner Ma. Rowena Amelia V. Guanzon and Commissioner Sheriff M. Abas during the Round Table Discussion "Increasing the Participation of Women in Elections" on September 3, 2015 in Bayleaf Hotel Manila.



Enriching the Gender and Elections Discourse

COMELEC anchors its Gender and Development (GAD) initiatives on national and international legal instruments to promote gender equality in the political sphere, and a renewed vigor to advocate for gender rights through its GAD-FPS.

In the international arena, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed upon by world leaders at a United Nations summit, aim to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities, and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind in the next 15 years. One of the targets, SDG No. 5 on Gender Equality covers the need to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.

To ensure the SDGs' success by 2030, UN women launched the project Planet 50-50 by 2030 (Step It Up for Gender Equality), which envisioned a world where all women and girls have equal opportunities and rights. Step It Up asked governments to make national commitments that will close the gender equality gap- from laws and policies to national action plans and investments.

In the Philippines, the Magna Carta was signed into law in 2009 by the second woman President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. The Magna Carta sought to eliminate the discrimination against women by recognizing, protecting, fulfilling and promoting the rights of Filipino women.

One of the rights heralded in the law is women's participation and representation, including specifically the integration of women in political parties. The law mandates the State to provide incentives to political parties with women's agenda. It further provided that the State shall likewise encourage the integration of women in their leadership hierarchy internal policy-making structures, appointive and electoral nominating processes.

Through the GAD Policy Studies Group, COMELEC GAD-FPS is exploring its contributions to operationalizing such mandate. To inform discussions, generate ideas, and foster a broad-based discourse on gender and elections, GAD-FPS launched a nationwide series of related fora, lectures and seminars.

COMELEC holds lecture series on gender and election

by Atty. Rona Ann V. Caritos, Gender and Development Policy Consultant

COMELEC hosted a lecture series with notable speakers, namely: Congresswoman Geraldine Roman (June 29, 2016); Dr. Socorro L. Reyes (November 17, 2016); Senator Risa Hontiveros (November 19, 2016); and Ms. Beverly Hagerdon (August 31, 2016). The lectures aim to increase awareness of gender and election issues, and generate concrete recommendations among COMELEC's internal and external stakeholders.



Representative Roman (right) receiving the token book *The Anti-Sexual Harassment Act: Notes and Cases* written by Commissioner Guanzon (left) after the lecture.

Cong. Geraldine Roman talked about the challenges of being the first transgender representative in the Philippine Congress, especially given the Congress' male-dominated culture. She then recounted her experiences growing up as a transgender, especially coming from a political family in Bataan. Congresswoman Roman ended her talk by discussing her priority bills in Congress, some of which were the Anti-Discrimination Bill and the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) Bill.



Election expert Hagerdon discussing election best practices with participants during her lecture.

Ms. Beverly Hagerdon, an international election expert from the International Foundation on Electoral Systems, gave the participants an overview of the status of women representation in Philippine Congress as well as possible reasons for this status. After presenting the reasons, Ms. Hagerdon briefly discussed the different kinds of gender quotas and how this could help increase the number of women in politics. The different countries with gender quotas were also presented as well as the best practices of election management bodies in different countries related to gender concerns.



Dr. Reyes (center) receives the token of appreciation from Commissioner Luie Tito F. Guia (right) after the talk *Electoral System: What works for women*.

Dr. Socorro L. Reyes, a renowned gender and governance expert in and out of the country, shared the different types of electoral systems and how these affect women's representation in government. She also explained other factors that influence women's political participation like quotas, gender sensitive political parties, and the larger sociocultural context. Based on the experience of countries with the highest number of women delegates in national parliament, she emphasized that for gender quotas to effectively work for women, the electoral system must be gender-sensitive and should enable proportional representation, closed zipper party lists, large multi-member districts, and a high legal threshold for securing a seat.



Senator Hontiveros (4th from right) with Commissioner Guanzon (4th from left) and other COMELEC officials during the senator's talk.

Sen. Risa Hontiveros, the first senator coming from a party list group, shared a brief history of women senators in the country. She emphasized that in its 100-year history, the Senate has had only 22 female members. Despite the country's advances in gender empowerment, the threat of sexual violence is still being used as a tool to repress women politicians. Sen. Hontiveros noted that as chair of the Senate Committee on Women, Family Relations, Children and Gender Equality, she hopes to change this status quo of gender inequality. She also discussed the Political Party Development Bill, which she and her party counterpart in the Lower House have filed. The bill proposes, among others, to give incentives to political parties that meet a gender quota.



The role of establishing gender quota in PH gender mainstreaming

by Atty. Rona Ann V. Caritos, Gender and Development Policy Consultant

Based on COMELEC data from the 2016 national elections, male elected officials make up an average of 82% of the country's elected leaders, leaving a meager 18% for female elected officials in all levels of governance.

The percentage of male elected officials decrease by 1% every three years. This means that by 2019, during the Philippines' next regular election, 81% of the elected officials in the country will be male and the remaining 19% is female. To achieve a state of gender equality in political participation, Filipinos would need 99 years, nearly a century, to achieve the 50:50 ratio of male-female elected officials in the country. The year would be 2118.

This puts into perspective how gender inequality in political participation persists in the country. The question remains *"Why do we have a significantly small number of female elected officials in the Philippines?"* And more importantly, *"What can be done to achieve to attain gender equality in terms of political participation?"*

Seeking answers to these two important questions is the driving force behind several GAD-FPS initiatives. This is also the reason behind COMELEC's advocacy on gender, voluntary, and legal quotas.

Gender quotas are affirmative actions on the part of the government to fast track female access to government positions. Meanwhile, voluntary quotas are set by the parties themselves to have a certain number of women candidates. Legislated quotas, on the other hand, are impositions by law on political parties to have a certain number of females in their roster of candidates.

One needs to know that legislated quotas are more effective because sanctions/incentives can be given to political parties for their swift compliance with the law unlike voluntary quotas where parties have the choice whether to comply or not. Notably, a voluntary quota by its nature will not require congressional action. Hence, the COMELEC GAD-FPS, through its GAD Policy Studies Group, is seriously studying how a voluntary quota can be implemented, including possible incentives to encourage parties to adopt the same.

It is worth emphasizing that the implementation of quotas will not be the sole solution to the Philippines' problem of gender inequality in political participation. Similar cases from various parts of the globe show that another major factor of gender equality in political participation is the country's type of electoral system. Success stories would indicate that quotas can address gender inequality in political participation but only when paired with a proportional representation electoral system.

Indeed, comprehensive reforms are needed to attain gender balance in politics. Advocating for a women's quota is just among the many GAD-FPS initiatives geared towards the attainment of gender equality in political participation – hopefully before the year 2118.

50-50 Gender Equality Forum and Stakeholders' Consultation

by Atty. Rona Ann V. Caritos, Gender and Development Policy Consultant

Prior to the supposed 2016 October Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) elections, COMELEC held three separate fora to discuss gender and election concerns in Bohol, Surigao del Norte and Cagayan de Oro City. More than 500 external stakeholders including local government officials and political parties, voters, as well as members of the academe and civil society attended all three events.

Each forum had three major parts. First was the presentation of election sex-disaggregated data; then the presentation of COMELEC's plans to comply with the Magna Carta on Women and Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 on gender equality; and lastly the open forum. The open forum served as an avenue to gather suggestions on COMELEC's GAD plan for 2017-2022 and solidify stakeholder support to promote gender-sensitive and socially inclusive elections.

During the open forum, the participants shared insights and suggestions on how to improve COMELEC's GAD initiatives. Most of the recommendations to increase women's political participation focused on providing financial support to female candidates and giving incentives to political parties with more female candidates. As regards gender inequality within the Commission, participants observed that most COMELEC field personnel in top positions are men. (It was recommended that more female personnel be deployed in the field.)



Fora on Gender and Election-Related Violence

by Atty. Rona Ann V. Caritos, Gender and Development Policy Consultant

From March to April, a few months before the 2016 National, Local, and ARMM Regional elections, COMELEC organized several fora on gender and election-related violence (ERV) in three separate areas including Bacolod City, Cotabato City, and Zamboanga City.

In these fora, the connection between gender and ERV were discussed. Recommendations and best practices to combat ERV especially against women were also raised. Other goals of the fora were to generate information on factors that affect women's full political participation in elections, to disseminate gender sensitive election materials to voters, to encourage greater and violence-free participation of women in elections, and to form a covenant for peaceful elections among candidates in the 2016 National, Local, and ARMM Regional elections.

The stakeholders present during the forum were candidates and their supporters, police, media, NGOs, and other concerned agencies like the Department of Interior and Local Governance (DILG) and Department of Education (DepEd).

Because gender and ERV were highlights of the discussions, women candidates and their supporters were prioritized as forum participants.

In the Cotabato City forum, almost 80 percent of the participants were women. The forum had the following major election topics: COMELEC preparation and control; Gun Ban; Fair Election Act; and Campaign Finance.

After the lecture, the candidates and all other election stakeholders present, signed a peace covenant indicating their intent to follow election rules and regulations, subscribe to the command responsibility rule (illegal acts of their supporter would be his/her illegal acts as well), attend candidates' forum to be organized by non-partisan parties, accept election results and not delay the proclamation of the winning candidate, and cooperate with COMELEC to have honest, orderly, peaceful, and credible elections. The participants agreed that there should be continuous efforts to discuss gender in the electoral sphere.

Participants were asked to answer survey questionnaires to determine their perceptions on gender and elections. The results of the survey were used in the COMELEC GAD-FPS study on barriers to women's political participation.

GAD-FPS activities to mainstream gender in COMELEC

GAD-FPS has been actively organizing activities to increase the awareness and understanding of the COMELEC personnel about gender and elections. These activities aim to build the Commission's internal capacity on GAD in order to uphold gender equality within the agency and ensure gender-sensitivity and -responsiveness of all its officers and staff in the performance of their election-related functions.

The recent GAD activities for COMELEC personnel include the following:

1. Establishment of the COMELEC Committee on Decorum and Investigation (CODI) on February 15, 2017;
2. Conduct of Gender Sensitivity Trainings (GST) for Election Officers held from November 23, 2016 to March 10, 2017;
3. Orientation on Men Opposed to Violence Against Women Everywhere (MOVE) among COMELEC personnel on October 27, 2016; and
4. Launch of 18-day Campaign to End Violence Against Women (VAW) from November 25 to December 12, 2016, as well as the conduct of the General Assembly and Election of Officers of MOVE COMELEC on December 12, 2016.

COMELEC forms CODI for main office, reg'l offices

by Nestor C. Nefalar, Acting HRMO V, Personnel Department and
Atty. Maria Theresa C. Yraola, Attorney V, Legal Unit, Personnel Department

In accordance with Republic Act (RA) No. 7877 or the *Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995*, COMELEC constituted its Committee on Decorum and Investigation (CODI) for the main office and regional offices on February 15, 2017 through Minute Resolution No. 17-0109. This new issuance strengthens Minute Resolution (MR) No. 15-0529 dated 14 July 2015, which initially activated the CODI through the GAD-GFPS.

The CODI is a mechanism mandated by RA 7877 for addressing sexual harassment. The same law declared as unlawful sexual harassment against women and men in the employment, education, and training environment. The law also requires all employers or heads of agency in the public and private sectors to implement rules and regulations prescribing the procedure for the investigation of these cases and the administrative sanctions.

As the central personnel agency of the government, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) has identified punishable acts and penalties, as well as the standard procedure for the administrative investigation, prosecution and resolution of sexual harassment cases in the public sector. CSC issued Resolution No. 01-0940, the *Administrative Disciplinary Rules on Sexual Harassment Cases*. Through MR No. 15-0529, the Commission resolved to adopt the said CSC rules.

Following the CSC directive, each CODI in the main and regional offices is composed of representatives from management, accredited union, second level representative, and first level representative.

Their functions are to:

1. Receive complaints of sexual harassment;
2. Investigate sexual harassment complaints in accordance with the prescribed procedure;
3. Submit a report of its findings with the corresponding recommendation to the disciplining authority for decision; and
4. Lead in the conduct of discussions about sexual harassment within the agency or institution to increase understanding and prevent incidents of sexual harassment.

Through MR 15-0529, the Commission also approved a capacity-building program for all CODI members so that they can be trained on the procedures for handling sexual harassment cases.

COMELEC election officers undergo gender sensitivity training

*by Maria Victoria S. Dulcero, Acting Director III, Planning Department
(Gender and Development Focal Person)*

Around 296 election officers took part in the series of Gender Sensitivity Trainings (GST) organized by COMELEC GAD-FPS from November 2016 to March 2017.

The conduct of the training is pursuant to COMELEC MR No. 16-0693 dated October 25, 2016, and MR 17-0047 dated January 24, 2017.

The training on gender sensitivity aimed to:

1. Increase the participants' knowledge on gender concepts and awareness of international and national laws and policies promoting gender equality;
2. Promote greater understanding on gender and development issues and their implications to the performance of their mandates, duties and responsibilities among COMELEC election officers;
3. Allow the participants to develop strategies on how to integrate GAD perspectives in all COMELEC systems, processes, rules, and procedures; and
4. Enable elections officers to assess and evaluate the conduct of GST and its importance in the day-to-day relations with co-workers, peers, and clients.

The resource speakers included GAD experts from the Miriam College Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), University of the Philippines, and the Philippine Commission on Women GAD Resource Pool Members.

The training discussions covered the following topics:

1. Understanding gender and gender concepts;
2. Legal bases of GAD including Magna Carta of Women, its IRR, and relevant international laws and treaties;
3. Gender mainstreaming;
4. Gender fair language; and
5. Gender responsive and socially inclusive COMELEC work environment.



The series of trainings employed participatory and collaborative approaches with lectures, case studies, group interactions, individual reflections, among others. Participants were tasked to identify gender issues and to provide recommendations for possible course/s of action to address the identified issues.



The participants sharing their learnings during the Gender Sensitivity Training conducted on November 23, 2016 for the National Capital Region election officers.

GAD-FPS holds talk on VAW

by Atty. Esmeralda Amora-Ladra, Director IV, Planning Department (Gender and Development Technical Working Group) and by Atty. Akia A. Co II, Attorney VI (Office of the Director, Law Department)

The GAD-FPS of COMELEC concluded the global celebration of the 18-day campaign to end violence against women (VAW) on December 12, 2016. This was pursuant to Proclamation 1172 series of 2006, which declared November 25 to December 12 as the 18-Day Campaign to End VAW, and Republic Act No. 10398, which declared November 25 as the *National Consciousness Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children*.

The 2016 campaign themed, *VAW-Free Community Starts with Me*, called for a more collaborative approach in raising awareness among all stakeholders, emphasizing that VAW is an issue of national concern. COMELEC GAD-FPS took part in various activities spanning the 18-day campaign period for ending violence against women including the November 25 kick-off event organized by the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) and Intramuros Administration in Fort Santiago in Intramuros, Manila.

In the afternoon of November 25, GAD-FPS hosted a talk on RA 9262 or the *Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act*. Atty. Maria Joy Karen G. Adraneda-Filio, Public Attorney II of Public Assistance Office (PAO), Executive Support Service Central Office represented Dr. Persida V. Rueda Acosta, PAO chief, and served as the resource person for the discussion on RA 9262. The speaker explained the various forms of violence and abuses committed against women, punishable acts, and legal remedies. An open forum followed the talk. Print and electronic copies of *A Primer on Republic Act No. 9262*, authored by Commissioner Rowena Amelia V. Guanzon, were distributed to the participants.

Attendees were 83 participants composed of the alternate members of the GAD-FPS Executive Committee and Technical Working Group (TWG), directors from the main and regional offices, provincial election supervisors (PES), and election officers. Representatives from the Philippine Commission on Women, Philippine National Police, and the national officers of Men Opposed to Violence Everywhere (MOVE) Philippines were also present.

MOVE-COMELEC Chapter launched

by Atty. Esmeralda Amora-Ladra, Director IV, Planning Department (Gender and Development Technical Working Group) and by Atty. Akia A. Co II, Attorney VI (Office of the Director, Law Department)

The November 25, 2016 kick off-activity of the 18-Day Campaign to End Violence Against Women (VAW) served as an opportune occasion to launch the COMELEC Chapter of Men Opposed to Violence Everywhere (MOVE). MOVE is a nationwide organization of men from the public and private sectors, academe, and civil society who are committed to the elimination of violence against women. Through the MOVE chapter in COMELEC, male personnel are now collectively involved in the fight against VAW.

COMELEC, GAD-FPS in coordination with the national organization MOVE Philippines organized the MOVE Orientation Seminar for COMELEC personnel in October 2016. Executive Director Jose M. Tolentino, Jr., Deputy Executive Director for Operations Bartolome J. Sinocruz, Jr., among others, attended the orientation. This activity led to the formation of a MOVE chapter in COMELEC.

On December 12, the MOVE COMELEC Chapter held its general assembly where the unit formulated its own bylaws and elected its new set of officers who will serve for two years. The chapter also submitted to GAD-FPS its proposed programs and activities for 2017 onwards. Atty. Joseph S. Vega, Election Officer of Antipolo City was elected as the chapter's new president. Mr. Reynaldo de Guia, the national president of MOVE Philippines, administered the oath-taking of MOVE-COMELEC officers.



A MOVE member signs his commitment to combat VAW.

Gender and Development (GAD)

- Focal Point System (FPS)

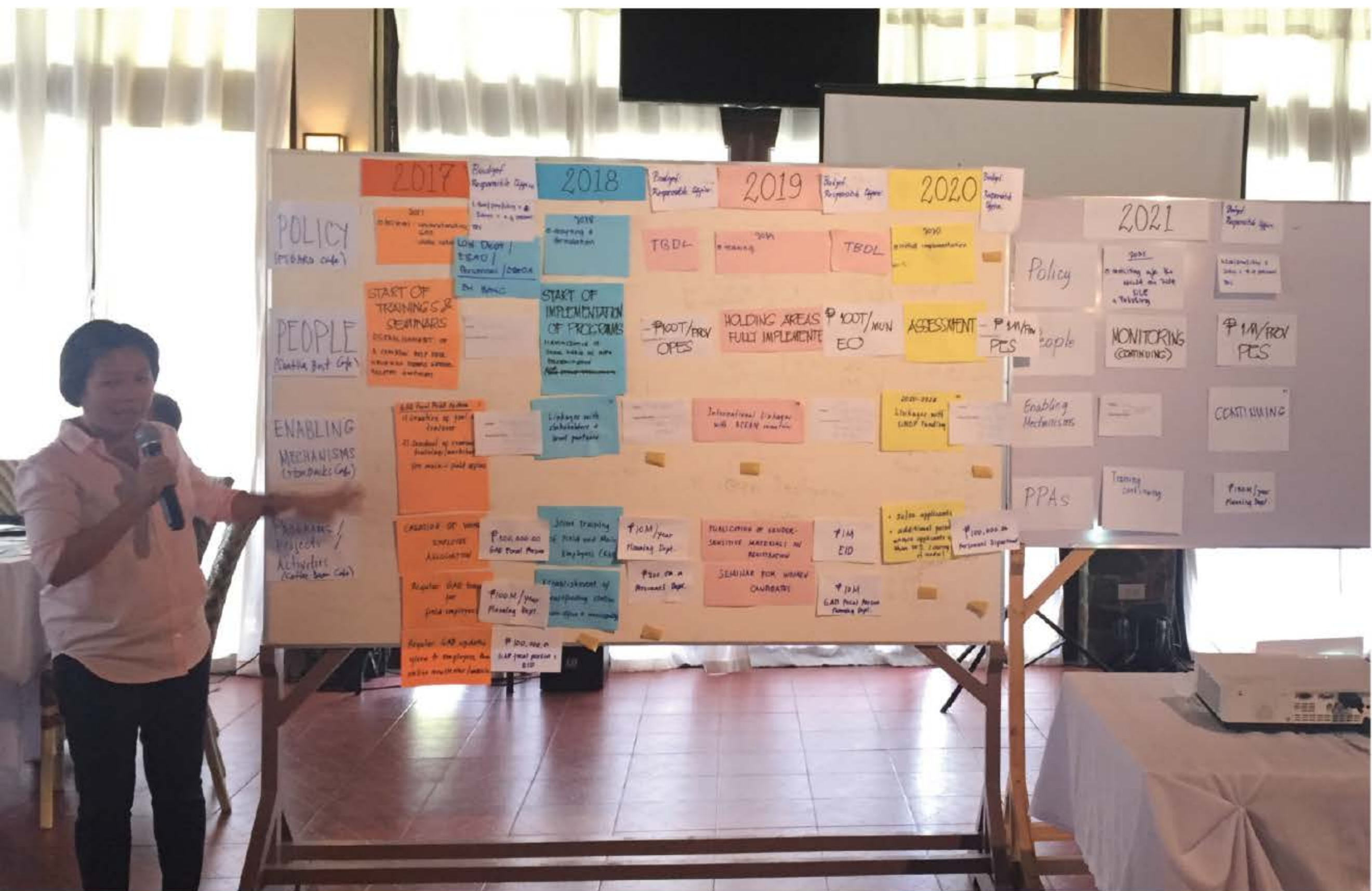
by Maria Victoria S. Dulcero, Acting Director III, Planning Department (Gender and Development Focal Person)

In 2012, COMELEC created its GAD-FPS pursuant to the Magna Carta. GAD-FPS is an interacting group of people in government agencies tasked to catalyze and accelerate gender mainstreaming. It is a mechanism established to ensure and advocate for, guide, as well as to coordinate and monitor the development, implementation, review, and update of the agencies' GAD plans and GAD-related programs, activities, and projects.

In 2015, the COMELEC GAD-FPS was reconstituted with the designation of Commissioner Ma. Rowena Amelia V. Guanzon, the lone female member of the current Commission and a staunch gender rights advocate, as Commissioner-in-Charge. The GAD-FPS Executive Committee consists of the

COMELEC Chair and six commissioners including Commissioner Guanzon who serves as Head of the GAD-FPS Executive Committee.

The GAD-FPS continues to lead gender mainstreaming efforts in the Commission with the support of the GAD Technical Working Group (TWG) composed of representatives of different COMELEC departments. In 2016, Atty. Esmeralda Amora Ladra, Director of the COMELEC Planning Department led GAD TWG Secretariat. She passed on the Secretariat leadership to Ms. Maria Victoria S. Dulcero, also of the Planning Department, in the succeeding year.



Consolidation of outputs during the GAD-FPS consultation planning workshop in Bohol.

Proposed 2017-2022 GAD Strategic Priorities

by Atty. Damcelle Torres-Cortes, COMELEC Gender and Development Consultant
(University of the Philippines Los Baños, College of Public Affairs and Development)

The Commission through its GAD-FPS adopts gender mainstreaming as a strategy to promote and fulfill women's human rights and eliminate discrimination in its systems, structures, policies, programs, processes, and procedures as it performs its Constitutional role as an election management body.

To systematically realize this commitment, the GAD-FPS identified the focus of its work for the next five years through a proposed 2017-2022 GAD Strategic Priorities.

The strategic priorities were formulated after a series of planning consultations and workshops with internal (COMELEC officials and staff) and external stakeholders (government and non-government partners).

During these events participants acknowledged gender as a cross-cutting issue and highlighted inclusivity and equality as core principles, consistent with the COMELEC 2017 Vision-Mission Statement.

Accordingly, the GAD-FPS seeks to contribute to the attainment of the Commission's vision by promoting gender equality (1) within the organization (internal), and (2) in all aspects of the electoral process (external).

Notably, the priorities ensure gender equality not only among COMELEC personnel but also among voters, candidates, elected officials and other election actors. This two-pronged/internal-external approach has been translated into proposed strategic priorities spanning the electoral cycle. Strategic priorities have been expanded into initiatives with illustrative activities to guide the development of the Commission's annual GAD Plan and Budget.



An election officer provides inputs to the GAD Strategic Priorities during the consultation workshop.

PROPOSED GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR 2017-2022

A Uphold and Promote Gender Equality within COMELEC

1. Build internal capacity on gender and elections
 - Conduct trainings on understanding GAD, gender-sensitivity (including gender-fair language) and gender and elections for Regional Election Directors (REDs), Regional Election Directors (AREDs), Provincial Election Directors (PES), Election Officers (EOs), and Election Assistants (EAs)
 - Organize other awareness-raising activities for personnel
2. Strengthen gender mainstreaming within the COMELEC
 - Expand the GAD-FPS
 - Institutionalize GAD planning, implementation and review
3. Strengthen gender mainstreaming within the COMELEC
 - Promote gender equality in human resource development
 - Protect personnel from gender-based violence
 - Provide gender-sensitive support facilities

B Uphold and Promote Gender Equality in All Aspects of the Electoral Process

1. Promote gender equality in registration and voting
 - Increase gender and elections awareness among voters
 - Gender sensitize registration and polling place management
2. Increase the number of women candidates
 - Build women's capacity to run as candidates
 - Open opportunities for women's political participation
 - Protect women from gender-based election-related discrimination and violence
3. Galvanize multi-sectoral support for increased political participation of women
 - Reinforce public advocacy on the capacity, contributions, as well as the need for/importance of elected women leaders
 - Build multi-sectoral partnerships to support women's political participation



Reflections on Gender Equality in the Philippines

Rosalinda A. Albia-Radin, COMELEC Election Officer (Parañaque City)

With Commission on Election (COMELEC)'s intensified efforts to mainstream gender issues in all of the Commission's functions and processes, it's employees are likewise expected to be able to articulate their ideas and views on issues relating to gender and political participation. A COMELEC election officer from Parañaque City reflects on the state of gender equality in the Philippines.

Albia-Radin (bottom row, center) in a posterity shot for the COMELEC Special Registration for Women and Girls on March 8, 2017 in Parañaque City with the staff of Ospital ng Parañaque and Civitan Parañaque Chapter.

Women's rights in the Philippines have gone a long way.

From our Malay roots during the Pre-Hispanic era, women had absolute independence. She was free to enter into contracts and was entitled to inheritance. These changed during the Spanish period when, women were forbidden to transact business without her husband's legal consent. During this period, education was also only for men. Filipinas had to follow the husband wherever he wishes to reside and only when he would move to a foreign country would his wife be exempted from this obligation.

During the American occupation, women's rights were part of the ideals of democracy. Considered the greatest achievement in this period was the introduction of education to women. Education gave women awareness on various issues, including politics. Women's groups were then formed, such as the League of Women Voters and the National Federation of Women's Club. They lobbied in the legislature and asserted their right to vote, to be elected for office, to own and dispose of their property, and to get equal pay for equal work. They succeeded in their efforts and were granted the right to vote in 1937, where 325 women were elected as heads of towns and provinces.

Today, the Philippines already has a number of lady politicians. There have been two women presidents and a number of women senators, congresswomen, governors, vice-governors, mayors, vice-mayors, and councilors including lady barangay officials.

We are moving towards making into reality the 50-50 gender balance mandated in RA 9710 or Magna Carta of Women. But to quote Dr. Socorro Reyes in one of her lectures, "Woman! Don't you dare quiet down!" There is still much to be done.

