

## Gender Mainstreaming in Student Organizations of a State University

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to determine the gender mainstreaming efforts of student organizations at the University of Northern Philippines. It also identified the challenges met by the student leaders in mainstreaming gender in their respective organizations. The respondents of the survey conducted were the officers of student formations and accredited organizations who attended the executive-legislative assembly sponsored by the Office of Student Affairs and Services. The researchers employed a qualitative approach using documentary analysis to determine the gender mainstreaming efforts of student organizations. The researchers used the Gender Mainstreaming Evaluation Framework as their guide, particularly along the four entry points: policy, people, enabling mechanisms and programs, projects, and activities. The information on the student leaders' challenges in mainstreaming gender was obtained through an interview with another set of student leaders. The study found that along with the four entry points, there are gender mainstreaming efforts exerted by the student organizations. The officers also encountered some challenges. Therefore, the researchers conclude that the university, through the Office of Student Affairs and Services, has already started mainstreaming gender in student services. Also, male and female student leaders have access to leadership positions in student organizations based on their sex-disaggregated data. However, not all are fully aware that gender should be mainstreamed in the four entry points. The researchers would like to recommend that the Office of Student Affairs and Services should be strict enough to monitor gender mainstreaming in student organizations.*

**Keywords:** *empowerment of student leaders, leadership, gender-sensitive student governance, descriptive-qualitative*

### INTRODUCTION

Gender is seen in the public and private spheres of society. It concerns women and people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions. It is all about people's ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and behaving within the ambit of any gender relationship. In educational institutions where gender socialization occurs, it is essential to look into how gender is integrated or mainstreamed in all their processes and functions and how gender and development is prioritized in their project development cycles.

Gender mainstreaming in education is the process of assessing the implication for all girl and boy learners, women and men personnel of all planned actions, including legislation, policies, or programs at all levels of the education system (Introduction to Gender Mainstreaming, 2019). Yehualashet (2010) has emphasized that gendered higher education institutions raise generations that confidently believe that sustainable economic progress

and development can be attained by guaranteeing gender equality and empowerment of women who have been marginalized since the long-established culture developed by the Spanish colonizers. Gender mainstreaming is also the process of incorporating a gender perspective into organizational strategies, administrative functions, and an organization's culture. It is considered that its heart is a gender-responsive culture. With that element, the organization should commit itself to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women. It would eventually lead all organizations' members to respond positively and actively work for equality, empowerment, and fairness in their daily work and interactions with others. The process of gender mainstreaming offers an opportunity to thoroughly examine all aspects of an organization through a gender lens, enhance the organization's work from the inside out, and gauge how well it follows its principles on gender and development.

Gender mainstreaming should be made an organizational priority, and securing the necessary support and resources requires making a strong case for the purpose and benefits. Although evidence for the importance of integrating gender into programs is growing, a similar base of data for the impact and value of gender mainstreaming does not exist. Gathering this evidence will be a challenge but must be a priority (Gilles, 2015). It seeks to produce transformative processes and practices that will concern, engage and benefit women and men equally by systematically integrating explicit attention to issues of sex and gender into all aspects of an organization's work (Cornwall et al., 2007). Organizational processes includes gender policy; staffing human resources; advocacy, marketing and communication; financial resources; and organizational culture (Cadorna et al., 2020).

Gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself, but a system, an approach, and a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the intent of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy/ dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation, and monitoring of programs and projects (Gender Mainstreaming, 2019). It is not just about achieving a gender balance in the organizations, but it is focused on their substantive works (A Handbook on the Application of the Enhanced Gender Mainstreaming Evaluation Framework, 2019).

Mainstreaming gender in all organizations and institutions is guided by different international mandates. It was adopted by the U.N. 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in 1995 as a platform for action. It was also embraced as a relevant strategy in promoting gender equality by the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in 1995. It was echoed as a strategy to attain the third of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the fifth of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Gender Mainstreaming Evaluation Framework (GMEF) is a tool to measure the extent of the gender mainstreaming efforts of organizations, both national government agencies (NGAs) and local government units (LGUs). It is also meant to assist the Gender and Development Focal Point System (GFPS) members in measuring gains and successes and pinpointing areas for improvement on how they mainstream the gender and development (GAD) perspective in their respective organizations. In the Enhanced GMEF, new and emerging gender issues and new policy issuances (especially the Magna Carta of Women)

are considered, and outdated indicators in the old tool are revised. The reference indicators from the Participatory Gender Audit (PGA) and Gender Impact Assessment and the relevant descriptors of the GMEF Version 2001 were also used. It has also adopted the scoring system of the Harmonized Gender and Development Guidelines (HGDG) of "No," "Partly Yes," and "Yes" instead of denoting only the absence or presence of a GAD element. This new scoring system considers the GAD efforts of the organizations that are still underway, such as draft policies and plans to establish GAD mechanisms (Enhanced Gender Mainstreaming Evaluation Framework, 2019).

In Gender Mainstreaming Evaluation Framework, there are four main entry points: policy, people, enabling mechanisms and projects, programs, and activities (PPAs), which are being considered. This framework has guided the researchers in this study to determine how gender mainstreaming is done by the student organizations in those four areas.

In the Philippines, many legislations support gender and development advancement and the realization of its twin goals, which are gender equality and women empowerment. These laws, circulars, and memorandum orders are intended for all private and public agencies and organizations, including the Commission on Higher Education, to which the University of Northern Philippines belongs. As a gender mainstreaming strategy of the said agency, it directed all public higher education institutions through its memorandum order no.01 series of 2015 (CMO No.1 S.2015) to institutionalize their required policies, standards, and guidelines on gender and development. This memorandum order mandates all higher education institutions, mainly the public, to mainstream gender in all their functions and processes using five percent of their total budget as GAD Budget under the law. In compliance with this, the University of Northern Philippines has formulated and approved GAD policies on administration, instruction, research, and extension. Providing baseline information on the extent of gender mainstreaming in instruction would enrich the planning of programs, projects and activities to institutionalize gender mainstreaming in the other functions of the university (Betita et al., 2018). On student governance and administration, the Student Council, as the highest student governing body, has a voice in the decision-making process for students' welfare and concerns through its representation in the Board of Regents. Aside from the Student Council, other student organizations with 169 male and 213 female leaders are accredited for the current school year. Through these organizations, the student leaders would develop their gender lenses, leadership skills, and capabilities and exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities.

Gender can be mainstreamed in student organizations. Their policies should be sensitive and responsive to the practical and strategic gender needs of all students. The student leaders should be aware of the gender and sexuality issues that could affect their gender relationships. Their roles and activities that focus on their working hours in school, family responsibilities, time, and location for relaxation should be identified. On the other hand, the programs, projects, and activities of student organizations should be gender-responsive to ensure that the integration of gender is fully attained. Their enabling mechanisms should be installed so their funds for gender-related activities will be allocated appropriately.

There are two primary functions of adolescents' participation in organizations, namely, as a socializing agent for the development of self-identity and values and as a venue for social contribution (Conaco et al.,2003).

The dynamics found in the formal group also reinforce values taught in the family, such as respect for authority and responsibility. Membership in these legal groups also prepares the youth for autonomy and self-independence, qualities expected from the adult world (Lanuza, 2000).

The student leaders are partners of the school administration to realize its vision, mission, and goals. Their programs, projects, and activities should be aligned with the administration's government initiatives and strategic objectives. In the university, student organizations are accredited and recognized before implementing their respective programs, projects, and activities identified as extra-curricular or co-curricular needed for all their members' holistic development. To ensure good governance of the student organizations, they are being monitored, evaluated, and awarded by the Office of Students and External Affairs to recognize their efforts, accomplishments, and achievements that brought the university into the regional, national, and international limelight of the education sector. More importantly, gender-sensitive or gender-responsive leadership should be ensured and sustained.

Therefore, it is essential to assess how far they have gone in integrating gender into all the processes of student governance. The research results served as bases for formulating gender-sensitive and gender-responsive student policies in the public higher education institution. They also served as bases to revisit and review the existing student policies to ensure that gender is fully mainstreamed in student organizations. They served as baseline information for planning and implementing programs, projects, and activities that would increase student leaders' level of gender awareness.

This research aimed to determine the gender mainstreaming efforts of student organizations of a state university. It also identified the challenges met by the student leaders in mainstreaming gender in their respective organizations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The researchers employed a descriptive-qualitative approach using documentary analysis to determine the gender mainstreaming efforts of student organizations.

### **Population and Sample**

The respondents of the study are the officers of student organizations at the university. Only those from major student formations and accredited organizations who attended the executive-legislative assembly sponsored by the Office of Student Affairs and Services served as the respondents, with an equal number of 14 male and female student leaders in the survey conducted to gather relevant information needed in the study.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

Before the conduct of the documentary analysis, permission was sought from the President. After permission was granted, a request was made to the Vice President for

Students and External Affairs, Dean of the Office of Student Affairs and Services, Head of Student Organization and Activities, and Student Government to facilitate gathering necessary documents. The documents provided by the Office of Student Affairs and Services, which the researchers analyzed, include the following: Student Manual, Sex-disaggregated Data (SDD) of student leaders, Annual Plan of Action, Accomplishment Report, and Operational Plans of the student organizations. The researchers have used the Gender Mainstreaming Evaluation Framework (GMEF) along the four entry points, namely policy, people, enabling mechanism, and programs, projects, and activities (PPAs), as their guide in the conduct of the study. The qualitative information on the student leaders' challenges in mainstreaming gender was obtained through interviews with another set of student leaders. The researchers prepared guide questions used during the interview.

### Ethical Considerations

This study was subjected to an ethics review by the University Ethics Review Committee with the IERB Code 245. Ethical considerations in this research concerned the respondents' rights and responsibilities as leaders, obtaining informed consent, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality, and justice and fairness.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Gender mainstreaming involves four entry points: policy, people, enabling mechanisms and programs, projects, and activities (PPAs). It is in these areas where gender should be integrated or mainstreamed in student organizations.

### On Policy

Based on documentary analysis, it is stated in the Student Manual of the University of Northern Philippines that under the Student Development Program, particularly 5.2.1 Student Government, Organizations, and Activities Services (SGOAS), General Services on Empowerment of the Student Government as Development Partner "provides the Student Government opportunities to plan and implement its programs, activities, and projects and on Collaboration and Linkage "coordinates with offices inside the university and with other external agencies in the crafting of programs, activities, and projects for student welfare and development." These provisions assure that student governments are given various platforms to empower their members through providing opportunities to plan and implement programs, activities, and projects that could genuinely address their needs and concerns and allowing and supporting the student organizations' various collaborations and linkages to widen their knowledge and experiences in student governance. This agrees with Li-Ching's (2004) findings that the voices of different genders during policy development should be heard. The finding also contradicts the findings of Ochieng (2014) that both the policy and organizational environment concerning gender mainstreaming in higher education institutions in Africa still require amendments and strengthening of structures.

The Student Manual, particularly in 5.2.2 Student Leadership, Training, and Exchange Services, emphasizes that the SLTES shall develop and enhance leadership

effectiveness by providing students equal opportunities in attending training, conferences, and seminars and shall maintain an updated sex-disaggregated database of students who attend activities and seminars. These policies reinforce students' equal rights to access and opportunities to develop themselves to the fullest to be of more outstanding service to the community. Further, maintaining an updated sex-disaggregated database of students attending training and seminars will ensure that gender parity is being applied and other gender concerns left unattended will be addressed. This finding contradicts the findings of Badri (2000) that there is a lack of overall gender-specific or gender-sensitive policies that could help empower women to hold leadership positions in universities.

The aforementioned policies serve as guides for student organizations. Also, student organizations are partners of the university's GAD Focal Point System (GFPS) and the Center for Gender and Development (CGAD) in the university's various gender mainstreaming efforts. Based on the survey, there are 16 student organizations with constitution-and-by-laws where gender and development are integrated.

### On People

Based on the researchers' documentary analysis, it was found that there are more female (213) than male (169) student leaders. This implies that access to positions and leadership is provided to female student leaders, and gender-sensitive student governance is observed in the university. This finding agrees with the result of the study conducted by Gumba (2016) that there were more females, about 59%, than male officers in co-curricular organizations, and the involvement of women in student organizations was very high at 61% or 490 girls while boys were 39% or 314. On the other hand, this study's result contradicts the finding of Azalia (2019) that boys and girls are discriminated against in the areas of leadership at Adwari Secondary School. It also contradicts the finding of Huang (2020) that female leaders in colleges and universities have less free time and fewer opportunities to participate in academic exchanges and further studies, and their academic research has been negatively affected.

The finding also shows that leadership positions are open to female student leaders, but a male student leader occupies the university's decision-making processes. As the highest governing student body in the university, the Student Council belongs to the category of significant student formations, which is male-dominated (13 or 7.69 %). The male President, a member of the Board of Regents, has represented the student body in approving the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995 or RA 7877. Based on the survey conducted concerning people as an entry point, most respondents have attended gender sensitivity training, GAD-related seminars, workshops, symposia, and conferences. This is because the university, particularly the Center for Gender and Development, in partnership with the different academic and service delivery units, is conducting activities that involve student leaders as partners and participants. Not only that, even external agencies that are conducting GAD-related seminars and training are inviting them to participate. On the other hand, some student leaders honestly answered that they had not attended any GST and GAD-related seminars and training.

## On Enabling Mechanisms

With other members of the Board of Regents, the Student Regent has approved the Student Manual that serves as a guide for all students during their stay in the university. The Student Manual 6.0 Part III: Student Code of Conduct and Discipline Article VII Penalties states that "expulsion shall be imposed on rape" (Section 2); and "the penalty of suspension shall be imposed on bullying, sexual harassment and acts of lasciviousness and recidivism of less grave offenses" (Section 3). Student organizations are bound to support this by establishing enabling mechanisms in their respective organizations to curb cases of sexual harassment, violence against women, and discrimination. The survey reveals that 16 student organizations have mechanisms to address the gender issues mentioned above.

Other enabling mechanisms being used by student organizations include the following: operational plans of students organizations are subjected to the Harmonized Gender and Development Guidelines (HGDG) to determine their gender sensitivity and responsiveness; student organizations collaborate with the Center for Gender and Development (CGAD) in their gender mainstreaming efforts making them partners of the Center in advocating for gender equality and women empowerment, student organizations solicit the assistance of the Center in funding their programs, projects, and activities (PPAs) through allotting an amount from the GAD funds; these organizations are requesting CGAD staff and GAD Pool members to serve as resource persons/lecturers in their GST and other GAD-related training and seminars, and their compliance in preparing sex-disaggregated data are being monitored by the CGAD, particularly in their operational plans.

## On Programs, Projects, and Activities (PPAs)

The mandated and accredited organizations had conducted GAD activities during the period when the study was done. These organizations have asked for funding and the expertise of the GAD Pool of trainers as resource persons and facilitators on the activities they conducted. This would mean that almost all the mandated organizations, including the Student Council, which is the highest student body, already internalized that gender mainstreaming is not just a mandate of the government but a needed strategy that the university should embrace. This finding conforms with the result of the study conducted by Yehualashet (2010) in two tertiary institutions in Ethiopia, that the majority of the female respondents consider that females value the university's programs and projects. It was also found that integrating gender equity in programs and projects is mandated, and giving priority to women and girls whenever opportunities are available is their utmost concern. This also contradicts the finding of Ilagan (2019) that by the extent of implementation, gender mainstreaming was less implemented in the area of research and moderately implemented in the areas of instruction, extension, and production.

Based on the analyzed documents, there were 22 mandated and accredited organizations that conducted internal and external activities that focused on advocacy activities for gender issues, sexual harassment, violence against women and children, bullying, issues on sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions, adolescent sexuality, and health issues and HIV/AIDS. They also conducted activities in support of the

government's mandate to celebrate National Women's Month and the 18-Day Campaign to End VAW. The organizations have used different strategies like seminar workshops, training, symposia, art exhibits, short film-making, mandala art, literary contests, and others. The GAD activities conducted by the student organizations are presented as follows: (1.) Gender Sensitivity Training and GAD-related training, seminars, and workshops; (2.) National Women's Month Celebration; (3.) 18-Day Campaign to End Violence Against Women and Children; (4.) Updating of Advocacy Corners; (5.) Art Exhibits; (6.) Photography Contests; (7.) Tree Planting; and (8.) Other Advocacy Activities. This finding agrees with the findings of Valencia (2017) that the students of the university organized themselves into the Urduja Youth and regularly held fora, symposia, rallies, training workshops, drama presentations, and group discussions, among others to popularize and highlight women's issues and concerns.

#### On Challenges Encountered by the Student Leaders

In the interview with selected student leaders, they mentioned that they encountered different challenges in mainstreaming gender in their respective organizations. The following are their common responses:

#### Lack of Resources

S1: "Our organization has limited resources to initiate GAD programs, projects, and activities."

S2: "Some student leaders are not yet sensitized, which leads to a lack of initiative in planning and implementing gender-sensitive and responsive programs, projects, and activities."

In terms of resources in initiating programs, projects, and activities, the student leaders claimed they had limited resources. This would mean that they are not yet familiar with the GAD Budget expenditure mechanism, wherein they could ask the Center for Gender and Development for possible funding of their GAD programs, projects, and activities. Since they are still neophytes in their respective organizations, they are not yet sensitized. They have not yet attended any GAD-related seminars and training that would elevate their awareness of gender issues and gender and development concerns.

#### Limited Knowledge of Gender Mainstreaming

S3: "I find gender mainstreaming as a relatively new strategy of the university."

S4: "I have limited knowledge and experience to implement gender mainstreaming in our organization."

S5: "I cannot recognize the importance of gender mainstreaming strategies to challenge gender issues, empower women and attain gender equality."

S6: "I am aware that the Center for Gender and Development is monitoring the gender mainstreaming efforts of student organizations because our operational plans are



reviewed by its staff before these are approved by the concerned authorities but I cannot fully recognize the significance of doing it.”

These responses of the student leaders would show that they find gender mainstreaming relatively new, and their knowledge and experience in implementing it are still limited. Some of them do not recognize the importance of gender mainstreaming strategies to challenge gender issues, empower women and attain gender equality. They do not also fully recognize the significance of reviewing their operational plans by the Center for Gender and Development. This means that most of the respondents are new student leaders, and they have limited knowledge of gender mainstreaming efforts along with student governance. This agrees with the findings of Antasari et al. (2022) that the aspect of student understanding of gender is still very low. From the aspect of implementation, it has not been optimal due to, among others, the commitment of the academic community to the enforcement of gender-responsive policies is still low, and the activities in the field of student affairs that are carried out are not based on gender analysis.

## CONCLUSIONS

Through the Office of Student Affairs and Services, the university has already started mainstreaming gender in student services, particularly in student governance, where the empowerment of student leaders is the primary concern. This is deciphered in the Student Manual as an essential guide for all students while they are enrolled in the university. Both male and female student leaders have access to leadership positions in student organizations based on their sex-disaggregated data. On the other hand, not all student leaders are fully aware that gender should be mainstreamed in the four entry points. Also, not all of them are aware that all people should be sensitized and involved as planners and implementers of GAD programs, projects, and activities. Some, especially the officers of accredited organizations, are not aware that there is such a so-called GAD Budget to be spent on GAD activities and that they could coordinate with the Center for Gender and Development for possible partnership and funding of their planned GAD activities. As far as GAD-related activities and projects are concerned, not all mandated and accredited organizations have done it.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the conclusions, the researchers forward the following recommendations:

- (1) The Office of Student Affairs and Services should be strict enough in monitoring gender mainstreaming in student organizations. It should establish a mechanism to ensure that all organizations are gender-sensitive and responsive. In partnership with the Center for Gender and Development, GAD Audit for student organizations should be done every two years to implement one of the GAD policies of university; There should be an award to be given to student organizations which will be evaluated as gender-sensitive and gender-responsive, and this will be included during the Awarding Ceremony which is done annually;
- (2.) The Center for Gender and Development in partnership with the Office of Student Affairs

and Services should regularly conduct gender sensitivity training and other GAD-related training, seminars and workshops for student leaders to make them more gender-sensitive and responsive; (3) Student organizations must have more enabling mechanisms that could address the specific gender issues and concerns of their members like designating a GAD Focal Person who should serve as their coordinator of GAD works; (4) The Center for Gender and Development and the Office of Student Affairs and Services should continuously conduct information, education and communication activities for all student leaders for them to become familiar with the GAD Budget which they could use in the conduct of GAD programs, projects and activities. Proper coordination should be made, and partnership should be forged in the conduct of their GAD programs, projects, and activities; (5) A clear-cut policy on gender mainstreaming in student organizations should be included in the Student Manual to be endorsed by the Administrative Council to the Board of Regents for approval to ensure that all student organizations prioritize gender.

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