

# **The Role of Women in Conceptualizing, Promoting, and Implementing Rainforestation Native Tree Forest Restoration**

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## **Abstract**

Rainforestation is a native tree forest restoration innovation. In the 1990s, a woman was significantly a part of the conceptualization of Rainforestation. In recent years, Rainforestation had been introduced in two small Municipalities in the Visayas where a number of people have embraced said conservation innovation. Nevertheless, this researcher has observed that the drivers of Rainforestation's implementation in two grassroots communities in the Visayas have been women. This study aims to investigate what moved a woman to conceptualize Rainforestation, explore what has motivated the woman who conceptualized Rainforestation and the two groups of women from different communities to take charge in the implementation of Rainforestation at the national level and in their respective localities,

determine the challenges of this women-led forest restoration initiatives, investigate into the things or benefits that Rainforestation has given to the Rainforestation adopters, and decipher elements of gender politics in the realm of Rainforestation's conceptualization and implementation.

**Keywords:** Native Trees, Forest Restoration, Gender Equality, Women Empowerment.

## Introduction

The Philippines is a predominantly Catholic Country like other Spanish-colonized countries in the world. As religion is part of culture, so is its influence on people's lives. As a Christian nation, Philippine culture is predominantly patriarchal and male-dominated. In fact, in their basic Catechism, Filipinos have been taught not just in the doctrine of a male-dominated religious hierarchy but also in religion's sacred symbolism. In marriage, for instance, wives are designed to be good homemakers whereas men are obliged to take care of their wives and look after their needs and wellbeing. Even now, divorce is still not legal in the Philippines, whom liberal minded scholars view as limiting women's choices. Even if one would trace into the Filipino creation narratives, one could decipher that Filipino men are expected to be strong while Filipino women are expected to be beautiful and be subservient to men upon marriage<sup>1</sup>.

Male dominance is still felt in almost every aspect of the Filipino way of life. Former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte had openly remarked that "*women were ill-suited for the presidency*" even if his daughter, Davao City Philippines' former Mayor and now Vice President Sara Duterte-Carpio had been leading in opinion polls during the 2022 Philippine Presidential Elections<sup>2</sup>. Fortunately, the current Philippine Government has implemented mechanisms that improve women's conditions. For instance, Republic Act 9710, known

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<sup>1</sup> F. Docdocil, "Malakas and Maganda" Ancient Philippine Creation Myth (November 18, 2020), <http://bakitwhy.com/articles/ancient-philippine-creation-myth-malakas-and-maganda>

<sup>2</sup> E. Cunningham, "Philippine Leader Rodrigo Duterte says Women are not Fit to be President (January 28, 2021), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/philippine-duterte-woman-president/2021/01/15/47f1125e-5703-11eb-acc5-92d2819a1ccb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/philippine-duterte-woman-president/2021/01/15/47f1125e-5703-11eb-acc5-92d2819a1ccb_story.html)

as the Magna Carta for women was passed. The Magna Carta for Women is a comprehensive women's rights law that seeks to eliminate discrimination against women by recognizing, protecting, fulfilling, and promoting the rights of Filipino women, especially those in the marginalized sector. However, even with the passage of the law, it is quite clear that the role of women in Philippine society is second only to men.

Unexpectedly, women from the Visayas Region in the Philippines have made their presence felt in the realm of nature conservation for the past three decades. These women have transcended the stereotype that women should stay at home while the men are out trying to make ends meet. One of these women has significantly contributed to the conceptualization of a conservation innovation that has harmonized nature through reforestation. Reforestation is a native tree forest restoration innovation that can sustain the smaller water cycles, the continuous supply to rivers and barrios, the reduction of erosion, the preservation of high species diversity, and the continuous high production of fruits, root crops, lumber, and other forest farming products<sup>3</sup>. This woman, Dr. Paciencia Milan of Visayas State University, has propagated and dedicated her life to the dissemination and implementation of reforestation in the Visayas and the whole Philippines. The other groups of women who have been actively involved in reforestation conservation efforts in recent years include members of two people's organizations from the Municipality of Pilar, in the Camotes Group of Islands in Cebu and the Municipality of Cabugcayan in the Province of Biliran. These groups of women have come out of their way to implement and propagate reforestation in their respective communities and break away from the stereotype that hard and manual labor are only for men.

Dr. Paciencia Milan has been instrumental to how reforestation has become a Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) recognized and practical forest restoration strategy not only in the Visayas region but the whole of the Philippines<sup>4</sup>. This study then aims to investigate what moved women to conceptualize

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<sup>3</sup> Paciencia Milan and Josef Margraf, "Reforestation Farming: An Alternative to Conventional Concepts," *Annals of Tropical Research* 16, no. 4 (1994): 17-27.

<sup>4</sup> Paciencia Milan, *Reforestation: Paradigm Shift in Forest Restoration in the Philippines* (Forest Foundation Philippines, 2020).

the concept of rainforestation environment conservation innovation, what has motivated two groups of women from different communities to take charge in the implementation of rainforestation in their respective localities, determine the challenges and outcomes of this women-lead forest restoration initiatives, investigates into the things or benefits that rainforestation has given to the rainforestation adopters of these two municipalities, as well as decipher elements of gender politics in the realm of Rainforestation's conceptualization and implementation.

## **Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative research method that focuses on the exploits of a woman and two groups of women that have made a difference in the realm of conservation. As Creswell<sup>5</sup> puts it, narratives could very much explain a phenomenon since it delves into the experiences in relation to the lived and told stories. Hence, this study has employed key informant interviews (KII) in arriving at stories of the women involved in rainforestation conservation. Secondary sources on rainforestation have also been utilized to arrive at a holistic picture of the significant role of women rainforestation native tree forest restoration initiatives.

## **The Woman-led Conceptualization of Rainforestation**

Rainforestation, a conservation innovation that made use of Philippine native trees in forest restoration initiatives, was first conceptualized in the early 1990s by a biologist, Paciencia P. Milan, from the then Visayas State College of Agriculture (now Visayas State University) together with Josef Margraf, a German consultant of GTZ or what was popularly known as the German Technical Cooperation. Milan first conceived of the idea of native tree forest restoration primarily because of Typhoon Uring (International Name Thelma), which hit Ormoc City in Leyte in 1991 and caused more than five

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<sup>5</sup> John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Sage Publications, 2007).

thousand deaths<sup>6</sup>. After Uring, Milan thought of what she could contribute as a biologist, and at least, do something for the environment to mitigate the effects of catastrophic environmentally-induced disasters. She then looked into the government-sponsored reforestation projects which used fast-growing exotic trees. According to Milan, the exotic trees were not more attuned to the Philippine climate, which may have been the cause of not serving their purpose of bringing back biodiversity to protect communities from effects of said weather disturbances. She then recollected that when she was younger, tree planting in the schools used Narra, a Philippine indigenous tree. Together with Josef Margraf, she then thought of a forest restoration strategy that used Philippine native tree species. The idea there was to criticize the species composition of the original Philippine Rainforest for forest restoration to be more successful, initiate the return of biodiversity, mitigate soil erosion, especially in upland communities, and support agriculture to make it more sustainable<sup>7</sup>.

When asked what empowered her to invest her time, efforts, and professional expertise in the conceptualization and implementation of Rainforestation, Milan answered that she had no qualms because her efforts in conceptualizing the novel forest restoration strategy would be respected in her workplace. There was mutual respect between her and her research collaborator, Margraf. According to Milan, she had an equal working relationship with Margraf when they would do experiments and dissemination of native tree forest restoration. Decision making in the workplace had not been a problem. Working with a foreign collaborator proved that gender issues were not a concern. As recalled by Milan, had her collaborator been a male Filipino when she started the conceptualization of rainforestation, the story might have been different. As Milan would put it:

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<sup>6</sup> K. Francisco, "Flashflood that Devastated Ormoc" (July 23, 2018), <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/flashback/151178-look-back-1991-flash-flood-ormoc>

<sup>7</sup> Paciencia Milan and Josef Margraf, "Rainforestation Farming: An Alternative to Conventional Concepts," *Annals of Tropical Research* 16, no. 4 (1994): 17-27.

*“It was easier for me to express what I found in my experiments in the Rainforestation conceptualization since Josef (Margraf) respected by opinion and that he had confidence in my capacities even if I was a Filipino, and a woman at that. Maybe the reason for such was because of the culture of Germans that did not care what one’s gender was as long as one got the work done. And it worked best for me during that time. My freedom to air my side had not only been limited to the realm of experiments, I could even express my opinion openly and it was also similarly respected by my male foreign research collaborator”.*

Furthermore, Milan narrated that one thing that caught her attention when she and Margraf started disseminating rainforestation in the communities was that most who attended meetings for rainforestation’s dissemination were women. A few men also attended such meetings. But as Milan continued, women were more consistent in attending meetings and being involved in the conservation initiatives especially in the implementation stage. Of course, this was understandable considering that the men or the husbands had their day jobs as farmers, carpenters, or hired labor to support their respective families. Nevertheless, women participation had been crucial in the implementation of rainforestation since they were involved in important activities like potting, watering the seedlings in the nursery, and enabling their children to participate in the conservation project.

Looking at the philosophical sphere with the women’s attitudes “to care more” concerning the rainforestation conservation initiative, one could also refer to the realm of “Ethics of Care” as evident to the women’s positive attitudes towards rainforestation. On the one hand, Milan conceptualized a forest restoration initiative with the use of native trees since she cared for biodiversity and for upland marginal communities affected by deforestation. With rainforestation, she theorized that it would bring back lost ecosystem services and, in the process, would make upland agriculture more sustainable. The “Ethics of Care” was discernible in the motives of Milan and the women who responded to her call to implement and disseminate rainforestation. Such were responsiveness, competence,

responsibility, and attentiveness.<sup>8</sup> In the realm of responsiveness, rainforestation was a response to mitigate the effects of strong typhoons and make agriculture sustainable. In relation to competence, Milan used her competence and knowledge in Biology to conceptualize a native tree forest restoration initiative that would be more effective, for she knew that as an individual given the privilege to possess the knowledge to address and mitigate the effects of environment-induced catastrophes, it was her responsibility to apply what she knew so that people from the margins would not suffer more on the effects of the harsh forces of nature. In a way, Ethics of Care had been manifested since Dr. Milan had realized that it was her moral duty to assist others by using her knowledge to develop strategies to protect vulnerable people from the margins. On the other hand, Ethics of Care had also been discernible in relation to the positive attitudes of women who responded to the call to implement and disseminate Rainforestation. As women could participate in rainforestation implementation related activities despite their duties as housewives and mothers, such manifests human strength which Nel Noddings had articulated. For Noddings, women's capacities for care should be taught and expected by men and women. Caring should be construed as a social responsibility rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness.<sup>9</sup>

### **Challenges to Rainforestation Dissemination and Implementation**

From the perspective of Milan, one of the barriers to rainforestation was being accepted by professional peers in the conservation movement. There was turfing in the workplace, which could be traced to male dominance tendencies. According to Milan, when she introduced the concept of rainforestation as a forest restoration strategy using Philippine native trees to Professional Foresters at a National Conference in Subic, Philippines, the foresters treated her with indifference. The indifference may have seemed to be an understatement since male foresters openly criticized her. They claimed that she was ill-equipped to even think of a forest restoration that would work in the Philippines. As one can decipher, the field of

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<sup>8</sup> Joan Toronto, *An Ethics of Care in Feminist Ethics: A Philosophical Anthology* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (University of California Press, 1984)

Forestry was heavily male dominated even until the present. Male foresters could not accept that a biologist, a non-forester, and a female was talking to them about forest restoration, which they had been working on since the start of their professional careers. Moreover, Milan continued that she did not expect to be met with such indifferent attitudes by foresters at the conference because she knew several of them and had worked with them on several occasions. Nevertheless, Milan also clarified that her work with the foresters in the conservation movement was more focused on environmental education, while the foresters did the more technical forestry-related jobs. For Milan, education was a job traditionally done by women, while going to the forests to study trees was a job mostly done by men. The stereotype of the realm of education, including environmental education, as a female associated job and forestry as a male associated job had, in one way or another, caused said indifferent attitudes among foresters towards her work, thereby leading to sexism and gender bias in the workplace. Milan continued her rainforestation advocacy despite the fact that her rainforestation campaign was not accepted by most of her peers. As Milan recalled:

*“The indifferent attitude by professional male foresters at the Subic National Conference did not stop me from disseminating and proliferating the forest restoration initiatives after the initial experimental sites showed promising results. Foresters being male, they might have looked at women as incapable of doing things that they traditionally do. Even until now, the field of forestry is still male dominated. Hence, it would be not be unusual if elements of male supremacy would be felt in the realm of forestry”.*

Milan continued that her advocacy in promoting rainforestation was disseminated in the different parts of the country and even recognized by an international institution, the Yale University School of the Environment’s Environmental Leadership and Training Initiatives (ELTI), as a model forest restoration innovation for marginal rural communities in developing countries like the Philippines. Milan further reflected that had she let emotions of being treated indifferently by male foresters affect her drive to disseminate

rainforestation and native tree forest restoration innovations, rainforestation could not have been implemented in communities across the Philippines. Milan added that one's gender – one's being a man or a woman – should not hinder one to implement something novel for the wellbeing of the natural environment and the whole of humanity.

Milan continued that her being a woman did not keep her from continuing her drive in promoting rainforestation even if it was not very much accepted in the earlier stage of its conceptualization and implementation. For Milan, women should not hesitate to contribute to society if they think such contributions would make a difference. Milan's determination to succeed could be the best example for women that they could make a difference in a community and change the lives of many. In her professional achievements, Milan became the first and only woman President of Visayas State University (VSU). Even during her stint as VSU's President, she continued her advocacy for the natural environment. Hence, to ensure that the science of rainforestation and conservation would be handed down to the next generation of conservationists, she pushed for sending VSU faculty members, women and men alike, to Europe through scholarships. She wanted the faculty members to be equipped with the best education to continue the conservation movement in the Philippines. Even in her late 70's, Milan is still very active and very much involved in the rainforestation forest restoration movement.

Looking at Milan's drive towards pushing for the rainforestation nature conservation initiative, her drive to push for its implementation across the Philippines amidst a male-dominated culture that has seemed to resist her conservation ideas has conformed with Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy, particularly her feminist philosophy. As de Beauvoir has put it, "one is not born but rather becomes a woman." Being first a human being, the woman then becomes what she is. Unfortunately, throughout the centuries, man has dominated her that she has lost her dignity as a human being and has been enslaved by man. He, desirous of maintaining masculine prerogatives, has exploited her physical weakness and her slavery to reproduction and has presumed to create a feminine domain, a kingdom of immanence that encloses her. However, woman, like man,

seeks self-fulfillment through transcendence.<sup>10</sup> With resistance from male-dominated forestry discipline in the Philippines, Milan willed to transcend stereotypes and biases to push for her environmental conservation initiative. Milan broke male dominated traditions by sheer will and continued her campaign, advocacy, and implementation of rainforestation across the nation.

## Benefits

Several benefits have been attributed to the realm of rainforestation adoption through the years. But for Milan, one of the significant benefits that she could think of in the implementation and adoption of rainforestation was that it empowered women in many marginal rural communities to get themselves involved in the conservation movement and transcended from the customary view of women as homemakers while their husbands were trying to make ends meet at the end of the day for the families' sustenance. According to Milan, rainforestation served as a suitable space to make women realize that they could also contribute something of great value and significance to society.

Moreover, rainforestation, as a forest restoration strategy, was also nationally recognized and recommended for implementation by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) through DENR Memorandum Circular (MC) 2004-6, Guidelines in the Implementation of Rainforestation Farming Strategy in the Development of Open and Denuded Areas within Protected Areas and Other Appropriate Forest Lands on August 30, 2004<sup>11</sup>. DENR's recognition and endorsement as one of the Philippines' Forest restoration strategies has enabled Milan to share what she has learned about conservation with a large number of people. This endorsement and recommendations benefit marginal rural communities since rainforestation gave such communities opportunities to address land degradation in their areas, thereby enabling them to make full use of the resources accessible to them. Furthermore, Milan also mentioned

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<sup>10</sup> M. Anacletus Ryan, *The Philosophy of Woman of Simone de Beauvoir* (Exposition Press, 1967).

<sup>11</sup> Paciencia Milan, *Rainforestation: Paradigm Shift in Forest Restoration in the Philippines* (Forest Foundation Philippines, 2020).

that one of the benefits of rainforestation was that it enabled rural communities to give future generations a chance to make use of forest resources when the time comes for them to utilize such resources. As Dr. Milan puts it:

*“There were lots of time that I was asked by farmers on what benefit would they enjoy when they plant native trees. “What was in it for us? My initial response to such question was to ask them another question on “who planted the trees that you use in your houses? Were you the ones planting those trees or some people who are 20 or 30 years older than you did plant those? Then, I would explain that planting trees is not for the current generation but for the future generations”.*

Lastly, Milan explained that the greatest benefit rainforestation had given her was the chance to contribute something of great significance to the enhancement of the wellbeing of Mother Nature. According to Dr. Milan, not all women have been given a chance to significantly contribute to the realm of environmental conservation. Women in the workplace, as Milan continued, had always been prone to challenges just because they were women. But the way rainforestation had been disseminated, implemented, and accepted through the years made her feel more empowered, and she was given the drive to do more for Mother Nature.

### **Rainforestation and the Women of Pilar, Camotes Group of Islands, Cebu**

The women of Pilar, Camotes, Cebu became involved in the environment conservation movement because they have been members of the Nakahiusang Katawhan sa Esperanza (NAKASE), a people's organization in the local community. Pilar is a small island municipality in the Province of Cebu and is located between the islands of Cebu and Leyte in the Visayas. The organization was founded in 1996 and found its strengths in family membership. Many of the citizens of Pilar are farmers, carpenters, hired laborers, and the like who also double as fishermen. The limited size of the island municipality had increased the pressure on the remaining trees in the

watersheds because when the seas are rough, people tend to farm even in the watershed areas of the island.

To add to the pressure, one alternative livelihood of the island's citizens is backyard livestock raising. Backyard livestock raising was not a conservation problem per se. Yet, during prolonged dry seasons in a very hot Philippine summer, when the grasses would turn brown, people tend to use the leaves of trees as feeds for their livestock. If the practice is done frequently, it would eventually destroy the remaining watershed tree covers. Hence, to address this concern, the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Pilar adopted Rainforestation and entered into a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with Visayas State University, which conceptualized the rainforestation reforestation strategy. To implement rainforestation in the island municipality, the LGU tapped a people's organization, the NAKASE, to lead in implementing said conservation innovation on the island.

With this, the organization is then assigned to raise native tree seedlings for the reforestation of the island. However, implementing this entails a lot of work that requires members to step up. Yet, as mentioned earlier, the people's organization assigned to implement rainforestation is founded on family membership. Nevertheless, since the Filipino men are culturally obligated to find means to support their families, the male population usually works during the day to make ends meet while the women are expected to take care of their homes. However, since the people's organization has to implement rainforestation the island, the women decided to leave their homes to carry out the tasks while their husbands are on their daytime jobs. One requisite to reforest an island is to establish a tree nursery. With this, the women have to collect wildlings in the forests, which men have usually done. The women have realized that they could also do what men used to do.<sup>12</sup>

Looking at the way the women of Pilar look at their status as women, this study has found out that they have not seen themselves as second-class citizens of the community. In fact, some have manifested that though they respect their husbands and, at times,

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<sup>12</sup> Fritz Geraldine Fernandez and Guiraldo Fernandez, "Rainforestation as an Instrument for Sustainable Development: Narratives from the Nagkahiusang Katawhan sa Esperanza (NAKASE) of Pilar, Camotes Island, Cebu," *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* 6, no.1 (2020): 47-70.

submit to their husbands' decision, a number of them see men and women as equals. The women of Pilar are empowered people working on an endeavor that may be the community's last line of defense against impending climatic destructions. They have already said their goodbyes to the archaic, traditional, and patriarchal family structure. Most members believe that decision-making on family matters, such as budget management and business, lies on both spouses. As one Pilaranon woman puts it<sup>13</sup>:

*"Para nako equal raman, para sa magti-ayon equal ra, kuan gyud oh." (For me, it's equal, couples are equal). "Mag kuan mi, mag konsultahay sa ako asawa ug pilay amu ipang presyo, pilay among ipatung." (We would consult each other on how much we should price our goods, how much mark-up we would impose).*

With all these said, the realm of conservation has given the women of Pilar to develop, directly or indirectly, a sense of being empowered and a feeling of being equal with their male counterparts. Their involvement in the rainforestation project has given them the opportune space for self-actualization and the recognition of their worth in a culturally male-dominated society. Nevertheless, this view of equality is similar to Simone de Beauvoir's notion of transcendence. She floats the idea of the acceptance of a gender-free model of freedom as a normative ideal for women's aspirations. She prescribes overcoming of gender to lead to transcendence. Beauvoir claims that women can be free to do what men do.<sup>14</sup>

### **Rainforestation Conservation Initiatives: The Challenges of the Women of Pilar**

In 2011, NAKASE was commissioned by the Philippines' Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to raise native trees, plant, and raised them with a fee as part of the agency's

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<sup>13</sup> Guiraldo Fernandez and Marlito Bande, *The Role of rainforestation in Forest Landscape Restoration and Conservation in the Island Municipality of Pilar, Camotes, Cebu* (Aletheia Printing and Publishing House, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," *French Studies* no. 72 (1986): 35-49.

National Greening Program (NGP). This has enabled the women to earn large amounts of money while at the same time, restoring large tracks of land in the island municipality with the use of native tree seedlings. Yet, this has not come in handy. Several activities in the NGP project have posed a challenge for the women involved. For instance, to establish a nursery for native tree seedlings, the NAKASE has to build a tree seedling nursery. This requires members to go to the island's forest and collect wildlings, a difficult and tedious job suited only to men. Nevertheless, looking at the opportunity to help the environment and contribute to their families' financial needs several women members of NAKASE have gotten themselves involved in the wildling collection activities. These activities exposed women to the dangers of being overworked by carrying large quantities of wildlings. Furthermore, women are again put in harm's way such as the threat of snake bites and other forest animals.

Moreover, women are culturally home makers and are in charge of taking good care of the children. Hence, the women have to work double time to be able to participate in the activities in the NGP. Juggling their homemaking tasks with their involvement in the NGP activities have taken their toll on women. The women of Pilar, however, have empowered themselves to transcend culture. They have made significant contributions to the well-being of the natural environment and their families. With these at hand, one has to note that Pilar's women were not supposed to be part of this project. Nevertheless, their willingness to go the extra mile enabled them to self-actualize and be part of this conservation project.

### **Benefits of Being Involved in Reforestation**

One of the discernible benefits women have enjoyed by being involved in reforestation are the financial rewards and the feeling of being able to significantly contribute something to the natural environment. In three years' time, NAKASE, with the active participation of women, has been able to plant native tree species in 520 hectares of land and raised around 50,000 native tree seedlings that, earned them Php1,598,000.00 (\$1.00 is equivalent to P56.00).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the sense of being empowered in a culturally male-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

dominated community is another benefit that the women of Pilar have acquired through their involvement in the NGP project. Transcending traditional expectations, the women of Pilar have achieved two important things: 1. The women of Pilar have financially contributed to their family income through the compensations that they have acquired from their work in the NAKASE – NGP project, and 2. The women of Pilar have also significantly contributed something to the natural environment’s wellbeing. Looking into the significant contributions of women in the Pilar National Greening Program, the women’s initiative to do what their male counterparts have done in forest wildling collection to establish a tree nursery is very much aligned with de Beauvoir’s notion of freedom. This group of women have captured de Beauvoir’s notion of freedom as they willed themselves to transcend their culturally determined role as only doing things expected of them as homemakers and mothers. They have embraced being independent and free-thinking.<sup>16</sup>

### **Rainforestation and the Women of Cabugcayan, Province of Biliran**

Just like the women of Pilar, the women involved in rainforestation conservation in Cabugcayan, Biliran are also homemakers who have taken the initiative to be involved in nature conservation. Unlike the women of Pilar who are involved in a government-funded project, the women of Cabugcayan, Biliran got themselves involved in rainforestation just to get a shot at contributing to Mother Nature’s wellbeing and to learn sound agroecological practices. Looking into the traditionally held beliefs of male domination, the women of Cabugcayan seemed to get out of the stereotype and do what their male counterparts did many times in the past. The experience of the effects of Typhoon Urduja (International name Kai-tak)<sup>17</sup> that hit Biliran in 2017 may have encouraged people from all walks of life, regardless of age, creed, and gender, to do something to care for what remains of the natural environment.

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<sup>16</sup> Ariadne Nicho, “Simone de Beauvoir: Freedom for Women” The Stanford Freedom Project [Simone de Beauvoir: Freedom for Women | The Stanford Freedom Project](#)

<sup>17</sup> Information source is [https://www.adrc.asia/view\\_disaster\\_en.php?NationCode=&Lang=en&Key=2242](https://www.adrc.asia/view_disaster_en.php?NationCode=&Lang=en&Key=2242)

When asked about how they manage to group and decide to get involved in reforestation conservation initiatives in Cabugcayan, the women answered that they are neighbors in a rural community in their municipality that have the penchant to attend government-sponsored meetings that introduce programs that may uplift the community members' well-being. Like the women of Pilar, the women of Cabugcayan usually stay at home, take care of the children, and do household chores. However, when there are community meetings during the day, the women would attend such meetings because the men are out for work.

According to one woman, she feels that the contribution of women in the community are as significant as the contributions of men. Yet, she has disclosed that she has felt that women's contributions are not given as much importance compared to the contributions of their male counterparts. For instance, the women's significant role of serving as Barangay Health Workers has not been much appreciated unlike the contributions of men such as the building of the community chapel or barangay hall, or repainting the community basketball court. The contributions of women have been valued less. This has not been a hindrance for the women though, as they continuously contribute to the wellbeing of their community.

Then, sometime in 2017, an officer of the Cabugcayan Agriculture's Office invited them to a training that aimed to implement sustainable agriculture following the framework of reforestation. From the start, the invitation to get involved in reforestation was just like any other invitation extended to the women in the local community. Hence, since said group of women were also interested in enhancing the agriculture sector in the local community, they did not say no to the invitation and attended meetings for sustainable agriculture in the barangay halls of their respective communities. Just like the women of Pilar, the priority of the women of Cabugcayan were the chores related to their duties as homemakers. They would attend community meetings when their household chores are already done. As a woman interviewee puts it:

*"When the invitation from the Municipal Agriculture's office invitation to get us involved in a government project on sustainable agriculture were given to us, I did*

*not hesitate to be part of it. Yet, I have some thoughts on how I could I do it with my household chores as a wife and a mother. Yet, I just thought of the things that I could contribute to my family and my community. Hence, I decided that I had to double time in my work so that I could have time be part of it. My decision to be part of sustainable agriculture training gave me more than what I expected. In the training, I learned of the relevance of native trees and their ability to mitigate the effects of soil erosion and landslides which the Province of Biliran had during Typhoon Urdoja. My efforts in balancing training in sustainable agriculture following the principles of Rainforestation and my household chores was not put to waste since it gave me an opportunity to contribute to my community that may also save my family in the future”*

Looking at the essence of the interview, the interviewee has transcended the limits of cultural expectations from women and willed herself to do more by taking on equally important activity. Moreover, another interviewee also mentioned that during her involvement in sustainable agriculture, she started to appreciate native trees and their capacity to bring the local birds back. During a native tree planting activity related to the sustainable agriculture conservation training, she wanted to convince her spouse to participate in the conservation movement when time permits. Her spouse eventually gives in to her invitation. Now, her husband has become an avid supporter of native tree restoration innovation.

### **The Challenges that Confronted the Women of Cabugcayan, Biliran**

As aired by the number of women from Cabugcayan Biliran on the challenges on implementing sustainable agriculture through rainforestation, one common challenge applicable to many of them was land tenure. As a matter of fact, most of these women’s families did not own lands. Many were tenants working with land owners who were mostly not living in the community. Hence, implementing the planting of native trees in the lands that they were working on was a

little bit difficult. In fact, there were times that the women had arguments with their spouses on whether or not they would implement sustainable agriculture. The land owners would not agree to such schemes and would just have them uproot the planted native tree seedlings.

Nevertheless, some of the women of Cabugcayan had made concessions with the land owners of sharing the benefits of the native trees planted in years to come through a percentage sharing scheme. This, in a way, made it possible for the women to plant native trees in areas owned by the land owners. The most important thing that the women had succeeded in conservation was their success in convincing land owners to allow them to plant native tree seedlings in selected areas in their property. The percentage sharing scheme on the benefits of native tree planting was only secondary. Looking into the way the women of Cabugcayan had convinced the land owners to agree to the percentage sharing scheme, the women of Cabugcayan had manifested that they see human relationships as a powerful tool to arrive at a middle ground or a compromise. From the lens of de Beauvoir, the initiatives of the women of Cabugcayan to negotiate with the land owners made them to transcend above interpersonal conflicts, which, through friendship and generosity enabled people to involve and to recognize the other and regard themselves and the other simultaneously as object and as subject in a reciprocal manner.<sup>18</sup>

### **Benefits for Being Involved in Reforestation and Sustainable Agriculture**

With reforestation, the women adopters of Cabugcayan Biliran have been given a chance to work in harmony with nature, and in the process, arrive at a realization that even as women, they could contribute something of great significance to the community, their families, and the society as a whole. What is worth noting is that women are starting to be empowered. Empowered in the sense that the women are doing what they are not supposed to do, and in a way, educate their husbands of the importance of native trees and their role in directing farmers towards sustaining themselves and their families. Lastly, the environmental benefits of Cabugcayan women's

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<sup>18</sup> M. Anacletus Ryan, *The Philosophy of Woman of Simone de Beauvoir* (Exposition Press, 1967).

undertakings cannot be just set aside. Being able to convince their husbands and the land owners to, at least, allow the planting of native trees in the vicinity of their community is already something good that happens for the well-being of Mother Nature. Planting trees may later lead to carbon sequestration, which is good both for humans and non-human living beings.

### **Gender Politics at Play in the Conceptualization and Implementation of Rainforestation**

According to Hart<sup>19</sup>, there are two dimensions of Gender Politics: 1. Decision Making, and 2. Gender Subsidy. In the course of this study, the researcher has found out that the two dimensions of gender politics have been very much present in the involvement of women in the conceptualization and implementation of Rainforestation. In the realm of decision making, gender politics are discernible in the workplace and homes of this study's women research partners. In the Philippines, conservation policies have the penchant to look at work places and households to act as one. Suppose politics inside workplaces and households are thought of at all. In that case, the assumption is that the male-head at work places and households have the power over their women constituents in the work place or over their wives in the households where the women constituents and the wives have the attitude of being altruistic<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, the feminist's version of the said models is inaccurate<sup>21</sup>. In this sense, work places and households may be construed as political arenas in which rules, rights, and obligations that govern gender roles are continually contested and/or reinforced in daily practices. In a way, work places and households do not act as one – or even consistently. In this way, there is a manifestation that men do not have fixed and stable powers over their women counterparts nor are women necessarily altruistic<sup>22</sup>. In the case of the women research partners in the conceptualization and implementation of Rainforestation conservation innovation, the women research

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<sup>19</sup> Gillian Hart, *Imagined Unities: Constructions of the Household in Economic Theory* (Berkeley: University Press of America, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

partners have, in a way, manifested to contest the long-held stereotype of women behavior by going out of their comfort zones and take on significant roles in the conceptualization and implementation of Rainforestation. It is clear that in such case, male domination has been contested, however indirect it may seem, since the women have strongly willed to empower themselves to contribute something of great significance to Mother Nature.

Moreover, there are also things in workplaces and households that women have great control of – natural subsidy<sup>23</sup>. In the case of Milan, the woman who first conceptualized rainforestation, she has great control and confidence on the possibility of success for the Rainforestation innovation since scientific data has been strongly pointing for the innovation to succeed. Being an expert in the field of Biology, she has the privilege of being an authority in her field of study that, even if contested by people, mostly men, in related fields, she has the authority to insist that Rainforestation has been field tested and is bound to succeed. She has proven such thirty years after conceptualizing Rainforestation in the 1990s. Moreover, the women of Pilar and Cabugcayan have sorts of bargaining chips and leverage to convince their husbands to allow them to engage in Rainforestation conservation innovation activities since they first finish their household chores to give them some time to be involved in rainforestation. For the women of Pilar, the financial benefits that they bring to the household income as a result of wildlings gathering is already a subsidy for the family income which the husbands have been put in a situation in which they could say no to their wives' involvement in Pilar's National Greening Program. With all these said, it could be construed that the women involved in Rainforestation conceptualization and implementation have empowered themselves to contribute something of great importance for the Natural Environment and have transcended the limits labelled on them in a male dominated society.

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<sup>23</sup> Carol Carpenter, "The Role of Economic Invisibility in Development: Veiling Women's Work in Rural Pakistan" *Natural Resources Forum* 25, no. 1 (2001): 17-27.

## Conclusions

Paciencia Milan's thrust in implementing and disseminating rainforestation after conceptualizing it in the 1990s has transcended the stereotype of women as only home makers. Dr. Milan has empowered herself to contribute something to the Natural Environment despite challenges, most especially in the workplace, because of turfing in the fields of specialization that has, in more ways than none, resulted from a tradition or culture of male dominance. In the same manner, the women of Pilar, Camotes and Cabugcayan, Biliran have also significantly contributed to Mother Nature's wellbeing because they empowered themselves by going out of their comfort zones and have worked double time in their household chores so that they could buy some time to engaged themselves in the conservation activities in their localities, and in the process, contributed something to the Natural Environment.

Moreover, the women of Pilar, Camotes, and Cabugcayan, Biliran have economically and environmentally benefitted from adopting Rainforestation after overcoming physical challenges such as the dangers of wildling collections, exposure to snake bites and other dangerous animals, and land use issues. They benefitted economically in the sense that they were able to gain from the fruits of their labor in cash and in kind. The women also environmentally benefitted from their work since they have planted large quantities of young trees that have significantly contributed to carbon sequestration and a potential for a vibrant forest to emerge in years to come that would bring back biodiversity and basic ecosystem services. Not only that, rainforestation sites implemented by women always have that potential for sustainability. Sustainability in the sense that they could make use of the things in nature available to them without compromising the ability of the next generation also to use and enjoy the same.

Furthermore, rainforestation has provided opportune spaces to empower women to do things beyond what are expected of them. With Rainforestation adoption, the women have achieved a sense of fulfillment, acceptance of their innovations in the workplace, and acceptance of what they are capable of in the household by their husbands, as well as the feeling and a realization that they can do things great if they will to achieve it. In addition to these,

Rainforestation also gave the women involved in Rainforestation the opportunity to assert themselves amid gender politics in the workplace and in the households. In the realm of decision making, women have showed that despite the culture of male dominance, such women have been able to decide for themselves because they have something in them that have enabled them to do so. Such refers to their ability to transcend the limits labeled upon them by culture by going out of their comfort zones to achieve what they want.

Lastly, the women of Pilar have transcended gender politics in workplaces and households because of natural subsidy. With the things that women have been able to achieve, like the possession of knowledge that gave them leverage to make men accede to what they want to achieve, as well as the ability to bring economic benefits to the households as a result of their work.

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