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Women Empowerment or Disempowerment?

A Case Study of a Social Microfinance's Activities and Gender Relations in Rizal Province

Women's empowerment has been at the center of the development discourse as one of the eight declared Millennium Development Goals. To date, an increasing number of development organizations are focusing on helping poor women achieve economic sustainability, and social enterprise in its microfinance scheme is playing a leading role in providing women with needed capabilities to increase their agency in the development process. The success of microfinance in empowering women today has been a debatable subject in the economic and development realms, thus leading to a need to reassess some of the microfinance claims. How does it really empower women? In which ways can microfinance assistance lead to an unintended and unfavorable effect of the disempowerment of women? To analyze and broaden existing understandings of women's empowerment, this research qualitatively investigated the process of women empowerment through a selected case study of a social microfinance operating in Rizal province, Philippines, using combined sociological and anthropological methods.

KEYWORDS: Women's empowerment, social entrepreneurship, gender relations, microfinance

INTRODUCTION

Empowering women and supporting gender equality are the stated aims of many development projects. Support for women's social and economic empowerment is presented by many as smart economy, or an effective way of addressing poverty linked to gender inequality (British Council 2017). To date, an increasing number of NGOs, social enterprises (livelihood organizations, cooperatives, and microfinance institutions), are showing keen interest in supporting women micro-entrepreneurs. The underlying assumption, as mentioned by Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Peace Prize-winner and founder of Grameen Bank, is that women's access to resources has a generally positive impact on the household's well-being. "When men make money, they tend to spend it on themselves, but when women make money, they bring the benefits to the whole family, particularly to the children" (Yunus 2007, 55). However, while some social entrepreneurship models have been purposely used to empower women by increasing their access to resources (Yunus 2007; Hechanova-Alampay 2009; Javelosa 2017), other observers contend that there is little evidence to show that these development schemes are leading to the projected development and empowerment outcomes of their beneficiaries (Kantor 2005; Karlan and Zinman 2009).

Written accounts of Hechanova-Alampay (2009) and Javelosa (2017) have indicated a general positive impact of social business models in mainstreaming women into the Philippine economy. Successful stories vary from advocacy-driven marketing platforms such as the GREAT Women Brand, a support organization that seeks women's economic empowerment through a regional supply chain; to the multi-awarded Rags2Riches, a livelihood organization that aims to empower poor women by providing them with an income, training, and marketing support; to SEED, a social microfinance institution that seeks women's economic empowerment by providing them access to financial and human capital to develop their micro-enterprises. Indeed, in its various financially-based models such as women cooperatives and microfinance institutions (MFIs) among others, social entrepreneurship has provided or increased financial access to many women, thus increasing their overall income.

Although women empowerment is continuously at the center of the debate on microfinance and social entrepreneurship, little is known

about the multiple layers in the process of women empowerment initiated by social enterprises (Datta and Gailey 2012). The present literature has yet to ask the questions to which this research aims to provide answers: How does the social enterprise model empower its women beneficiaries? In which ways does it enhance or decrease their overall capabilities? Finally, does the social enterprise's support for women's needs impact existing gender relations and contribute in changing social norms?

Empowerment is often linked to power, inequality, and oppression (Rowlands 1995). Although definitions vary from one author to another, a common perception defines empowerment as the process by which a person who has been previously denied some rights can (1) become aware of the power dynamics in the system, (2) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (3) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others, and (4) support the empowerment of others in the community (Rowlands 1995, 103; Mosedale 2005).

This study thus investigates the empowerment process of women micro-entrepreneurs through the microfinance schemes of social entrepreneurship. As Datta and Gailey (2012) have argued, to understand the process of women's empowerment, one must have an initial understanding of how and why women are oppressed. Investigating women empowerment ultimately leads to the understanding of their agency or the ways by which women negotiate or participate in existing social structures (Giddens 1984; Sen 2000). The study uses social economist Naila Kabeer's framework suggesting that there are three interrelated dimensions required for women to be empowered to make decisions in their lives: (1) access to resources, including preconditions; (2) agency, including process; and (3) achievements, including outcomes (Kabeer 1999, 437). A case study of a social microfinance institution that provides women entrepreneurs with financial resources and trainings is used to assess the different layers of women empowerment through social entrepreneurship.

Defined as a social microfinance organization, the Social Enhancement for Entrepreneurial Development Inc. (SEED) operates in the context of private-initiated organizations that can be categorized as social enterprises. The ultimate aim of these organizations is to empower marginalized groups, especially women in poor communities, by providing them with access to financial, human, and social resources. The organization, like many social

enterprise ventures that focus on the micro-entrepreneurs' needs, aims to help poor women by supporting the spark of small scale self-employment ventures through which they could lift themselves and their families out of poverty (Yunus 2003). Whereas traditional banks deemed poor people, especially poor women, not credit worthy (Ip 2012; Panganiban 1998; Yunus 2003), these organizations believe that by increasing women's access to resources they can be empowered (Yunus 2003; Yunus 2010). For the purpose of this research, SEED was selected as it suits the profile of a social microfinance that provides financial assistance in terms of loans with no collateral attached and with a preferential option for women entrepreneurs—although it also caters to men entrepreneurs.

The research took place in multiple sites in Rizal province: namely in the barangay's San Jose and Pinugay in the municipality of Baras, and in the barangays Bagong Nayon, Inarawan, Cupang, and San Roque in the municipality of Antipolo. The choice of a multi-sited research approach was motivated by the need to cover various forms of micro-enterprises. Since different forms of self-employment ventures could lead to different development outcomes (Malaya 2006; Ampel-Milagrosa 2014), it appears reasonable that a variety of entrepreneurial models would give a more comprehensive view of the different contexts that characterize them. Despite the inherent practical difficulties that accompany a multi-sited research approach, such as time and resource constraints, it has the advantage of offering comparative grounds for analyzing female entrepreneurial development (Nadai and Maeder 2005).

The targeted research groups were randomly selected from among the poor urban and semi-rural communities in the province of Rizal, whose micro-entrepreneurs receive financial aid, social support, and training from SEED Center Philippines Inc. Out of the 381 current SEED beneficiaries, some 13 women micro-entrepreneurs operating in 6 different SEED sites in Rizal province were randomly selected for in-depth interviews. Among the 13 female respondents, 4 have joint-businesses with their husbands. The 4 husbands were also interviewed. In order to generate more complex research data for analysis, the selected microenterprises were chosen to represent diverse groups of respondents, prioritizing the different forms of self-employment ventures.

Although various municipalities in Rizal may claim to have a hundred percent of their population residing in areas classified as

urban, the municipalities of Baras and Antipolo still have populations living in areas categorized as rural or semi-rural. According to a government census of household populations, both municipalities have also registered a high population growth rate in the past two decades owing to in-migration factors. In the case of Antipolo, such population growth is partly caused by a rapid development of subdivisions in specific areas that cater to the high and middle income class brackets. A striking contrast can be seen in several other parts of Antipolo and Baras where other types of migrants belonging to low income groups find a new home. Unlike the previous group, these latter groups tend to reside in low cost housing projects or live in slums or squatter settlements.

Similarly, the economic activity of Rizal province and that of the two municipalities where the researcher collected the data is diverse. Moreover, the regional target employment rate for 2010 appears to have been achieved, as the overall employment rate nearly reached 93 percent in Calabarzon.¹ Considering this recent regional economic performance—however, it would be presumptuous to assume that the entire population benefits from the same advantage as wide socio-economic disparities across sectors and classes are noticeable all over the region. High and persistent levels of inequality—incomes and assets—which dampen the positive impacts of economic expansion are some of the major causes of poverty incidence in the Philippines (ADB 2009).² Such inequality in access to socio-economic resources was indeed apparent in the research sites.

The research findings indicate that the social enterprise development schemes benefit women micro-entrepreneurs by enhancing their economic security, thus leading to the development of entrepreneurial behavior; and increased contributions to the family finances. Increased access to financial and human capital provides a limited increase to women's agency, especially as they gain more decision-making power on how their earned income can be spent. It does not, however, change existing and constraining social norms such as gendered work division within the household. Nonetheless, women entrepreneurs have their own way of negotiating gender relations within the household, leading to better time management and heightened well-being. This is apparent in cases where the female entrepreneur “recruits” the male spouse into the business to take up more work responsibilities while she can devote more time to household needs.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A concern for people's agency is central to the discourse of people's empowerment and development (Sen 2000; Ibrahim and Alkire 2007). As indicated by Amartya Sen (2000), development is related to the freedom that a person has to choose a life he or she wants. Development or empowerment implies therefore the freedom to take action in one or more spheres of one's life (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007). Conversely, sources that draw on poor people's own perceptions of their situation often report that agency is central to their description of well-being (*ibid.*). Because people cannot be developed but can only develop themselves (Nyerere 1974), empowerment schemes result in increasing people's agency to make strategic choices for development (Sen 2000; Rowlands 1995; Kabeer 1999; Mosedale 2005).

Empowerment being a process of change that implies movement from one situation to another can therefore be measured (Mosedale 2005). Researchers such as Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) and Clifford et al. (2013) have been proposing indicators such as control over personal, household, and community decisions among others, for internationally comparable measures that analyze empowerment. Theories on measuring empowerment generally agree that empowerment or social impact is embedded in the organization model that aims to empower (Kabeer 1999; Ibrahim and Alkire 2007; Clifford et al. 2013).

In assessing the social impact measurement for social enterprises, Clifford et al. (2013) highlighted a framework with two key elements. From their studies, empowerment is perceived as a theory of change or improvement (financial and non-financial) over a period of time, and should be analyzed from the beneficiaries' perspectives (*ibid.*). This framework is consistent with Kabeer's (1999) oft-cited article on measuring women's empowerment. Defining empowerment as the "ability to make a choice," Kabeer suggests three interrelated dimensions required for women's empowerment—as previously stated: (a) access to resources, including preconditions; (b) agency, including process; and (c) achievements, including outcomes (437). As the subsequent discussion of the research findings attests, these dimensions contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the social impact process.

The present literature mentioned has demonstrated the allure of social entrepreneurship as a model for solving some of society's most entrenched social problems (Austin et al. 2006; Mair et al. 2006; Brooks 2009; Borstein and Davis 2010). From its conceptualization

as the use of innovative and entrepreneurial skills to address unmet social needs (Mair et al. 2006; Austin et al. 2006), the advancement of social change clearly emerges as central to the definition of social entrepreneurship (Haugh and Talwar 2016). However, while the notion of social enterprise has an obvious appeal for many, its ultimate impact on the beneficiaries and the society at large has yet to be established (Masetti 2011).

In recent years, social entrepreneurship has been presented as an efficient way to address gender inequality in the job market (Glinskiet al. 2015; Haugh and Talwar 2016). By offering self-employment opportunities to women, social enterprises can contribute to women's social inclusion and empowerment (Datta and Gailey 2012). Indeed, in its various financially-based models such as women cooperatives and social microfinance institutions among others, social entrepreneurship has provided or increased financial access to many women, thereby increasing their overall income. However, one line of thought suggests that an increase in women's income does not automatically lead to their empowerment (Haugh and Talwar 2016). It may even decrease their empowerment to some extent (Kantor 2005). This raises intriguing questions about the social impact of social enterprises' support to women: How does a social enterprise empower its women beneficiaries? In what ways can a social enterprise's support to women's needs empower them and have significance in changing existing social orders?

In the past decade, researchers have used Kabeer's empowerment framework to assess women's empowerment through social entrepreneurship (Haugh and Talwar 2016; Datta and Gailey 2012). In analyzing a women's cooperative in India, Haugh and Talwar (2016) indicated that women's participation in cooperatives empowers them to influence both how they use their time and how family income is spent. The study contended therefore that social entrepreneurship increases individual agency which contributes to personal well-being (Haugh and Talwar 2016). Supporting such claims in a latter study in India, Datta and Gailey's (2012) findings argue that social enterprises have the potential to empower women in three ways: economic security, development of entrepreneurial behavior, and increased contributions to the family.

These findings are consistent with Filipino literature on the impact of social enterprises in responding to women's needs (Hechanova-Alampay 2009; British Council 2015; Javelosa 2017). Basing her

analysis on the economic empowerment of women through the provision of access to business income and marketing of products, Jeannie E. Javelosa (2017) argues that economically empowering women means a way out of poverty because women plow back their income toward their children's health, nutrition, and education. Similarly, in a compilation of short stories involving social enterprises in the Philippines, Hechanova-Alampay (2009) identifies cases of social enterprises that seek to address social problems by enhancing the assets of the marginalized, especially women.

Such assumptions on the impact of social enterprises, especially in their microfinance development schemes, have been questioned by Kantor (2005), Karlan and Zinman (2009), Arhin et al. (2015). Investigating the impact of MFI schemes targeting women entrepreneurs through the study of a rural Philippine bank, First Macro Bank (FMB), Karlan and Zinman (2009) contend that there is little evidence that increased access to credit had more positive effects on women. The results show that with access to credit, profits increase for men, but less so and not statistically significantly for women (Karlan and Zinman 2009,12). However, as both researchers admitted, the study does not analyze whether the difference in returns for men and women is driven by social status, gender relations, or entrepreneurial choice (*ibid.*).

Moreover, according to some critics (Forbes 2009), the Philippine bank studied by Karlan and Zinman is not a typical model of social microfinance. Arguably, a different microcredit approach that provides comprehensive assistance to women micro-entrepreneurs' needs by enhancing their human and social resources beyond the financial ones can have a different effect (Datta and Gailey 2012, Haugh and Talwar 2016, Glinski et al. 2015). This is corroborated by other studies attesting that women's empowerment implies much more than a provision of resources (Arhin et al. 2015). With empowerment understood as the ability to make choices (Kabeer 1999), social development schemes that aim to empower women need to address the different ways that increase a woman's ability to choose.

Arguing against microenterprise success often being evaluated solely in terms of economic outcomes, Paula Kantor (2005) contends that in the Indian social context, access to resources may not lead directly to improvements in women's position within the household. The findings point out that unlike the work outside of the home, home-based work tend to be less empowering to women in terms of

their involvement in decisions which are atypically women's and yet significant to their lives (Kantor 2005). Such a perspective argues that it is the ability or failure to participate in household decision-making that renders a woman empowered or disempowered (Kantor 2005; Ibrahim and Alkire 2007). Ultimately, women's empowerment through social enterprises or MFIs has been assessed from the beneficiaries' perspectives and in relation to power or constraining structures to women's freedom to make strategic choices for their own well-being (Kabeer 1999; Ibrahim and Alkire 2007). For this, empowerment discourses take into consideration social norms and relations within the household (Arhin et al. 2015; Glinski et al. 2015; British Council 2017).

RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

The municipality of Baras, with the lowest density in the province at 371 persons per square kilometer and an annual growth rate higher than the provincial average at 3.55 percent, may appropriately exemplify the disparity in access to socio-economic resources in the region. In fact, the low density may be attributed to low employment opportunities in the municipality to accommodate its labor force. Notably, the municipality has been exporting labor force to the neighboring labor attraction cities such as Metro Manila, Cainta, and Antipolo City. However, Baras also belongs to the fast-growing municipalities because it is a potential receptacle of urban spillovers from Metro Manila and neighboring cities, which translates to an average population increase of 1,223 persons per year (Rizal province official website).³

Within the municipality, the two barangays where the research was conducted, namely San Jose and Pinugay, are partly rural areas. In these areas, families typically live in one-story structures made of wood coupled with light, mixed, or strong materials. Some houses accommodate extended families. However, many families have relatives living in the neighborhood. Beside the main road that is half-way paved, most of the streets in the community are dirt roads. Many houses do not have running water and the inhabitants still use the hand pump for water. Several families get electricity by tapping into the lines of neighbors for a small monthly fee. Aside from scarce job opportunities in the municipality, jobs are generally low skilled with meager pay. Most men work in the nearby plantations, while others

work as construction workers, vendors, tricycle drivers, and the like. Those with better qualifications often search for employment in the neighboring cities of Antipolo, Cainta, or Metro Manila.

Parallel to such economic fragility, there is a growing number of microenterprise developments in these communities. Many households engage in small kinds of productive activities. While few men engage in some form of a microenterprise or join their spouses in business, microenterprise activities are predominantly run by women in these communities. Most of these activities are located inside the house or in the front yard, or on the main roads where women sell various commodities from fruits to *ukay-ukay* (secondhand clothes). Some women sew dresses and curtains in their houses, or own a *carinderia* (small canteen) where they serve home-cooked meals to neighbors, students, and workers. In addition, many families operate a *sari-sari* store (mini convenience store) in front of their houses.

Kabasbas, on the other hand, is located in Barangay San Roque, a few meters away to the south of the Golden Hills subdivision in upper Antipolo. The community is located on a small hill and in a somewhat isolated area, surrounded by nearby resorts and subdivisions. A few hundred houses meandering along the main dirt road make up the community. The infrastructures of the area are rudimentary. Similar to barangays San Jose and Pinugay, most houses are built of wood and very cheap or light materials. As for work, a majority of the men are engaged as manual laborers in nearby construction sites or in other parts of Antipolo. Most of the families are migrants coming from the countryside but a good number of them have called this place home for more than a decade.

The main economic activity of women in the community is rug sewing. As they are often homebound for household chores, they make rugs in their daily free time in order to fight boredom and in their own words, “To help their husbands by earning some extra-income.” Sometimes the women multitask making rugs while attending to household obligations. Their preferred time for these activities is in the afternoon—after they have finished preparing their children for school, cleaning, washing, and cooking. Making rugs also gives them an opportunity to chat, sharing stories with neighbors as they gather in a friend’s house. Seldom have they considered such activities as a potential main source of income.

In the Cogeo area, respondents came from the neighboring barangays Bagong Nayon, Inarawan, and Cupang. Unlike the localities

of Kabasbas and Baras that could be considered as rural or semi-rural, Cogeo is in an urban environment. The three communities where the research was conducted differ therefore from the previous communities in terms of their physical environment. In the exception of one settlement community along the Sapa Bute Bute River, the three barangays have better infrastructures than in Baras and Kabasbas. Most houses are one-story brick structures, and a few are two-story buildings. The barangays relative position near urban centers offers the inhabitants a variety of options for education, health, employment, and business ventures. Similar to Kabasbas, most of the people in these barangays are migrants coming from the countryside in search of better life opportunities in the city. Most men do low-skilled work around Cogeo or go to Metro Manila or Antipolo to work as security guards, construction workers, salesmen, factory workers, etc.

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND METHODS

Following Datta and Gailey (2012) and Haugh and Talwar's (2016) investigation of women empowerment, this research combined sociological and anthropological methods in a qualitative approach. This methodological choice was influenced by two factors. First, details about the daily lives of women micro-entrepreneurs in the research sites are often undocumented, and as Datta and Gailey (2012, 647) put it, "their world is typically hidden from view and we know little about the strategies they adopt to survive." Hence, a qualitative research would give light to undocumented social practices that are useful in understanding the process of women empowerment. Second, investigating gender implications on empowerment raises issues on gender relations and power relations that can be better captured through in-depth interviews than statistical data (Datta and Gailey 2012, 647; Given 2008).

This research utilized a socio-anthropological perspective with ethnographic underpinnings, focusing on qualitative data collected through four major techniques: secondary data collection, participant and direct observation, in-depth key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. Using these techniques, data were gathered through several stages. Secondary data in the form of written documents consisting of social business registers, social enterprise data records, PPI (Progress out of Poverty Index), household and business income

surveys, household and business expenditures were collected from SEED staff members. Participant and direct observation methods were used during the entire field research period that lasted for three months. Normally, the researcher would spend about three to five days visiting the same entrepreneur to become familiar with both the entrepreneur's work and some socio-cultural patterns within the respondent's household. In-depth interviews of key informants were conducted during that time. Trusted internet-based information was also collected: data from the social business website, census data from the government, the barangays and municipalities' official websites.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH THE SOCIAL MICROFINANCE SCHEME

Foremost, this research's findings support claims made by Mair and Schoen (2007), Santos (2009), and Datta and Gailey (2012) that empowerment elements are embedded in the business models of the social entrepreneurial venture. The particular model of SEED as a microfinance social enterprise determines the kind of empowerment the organization can provide to the group that is being assisted. A different social enterprise operating as a cooperative, or in any other social organization form, may lead to a different empowerment outcome.

A number of studies such as Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) have been proposing indicators for internationally comparable measures that analyze empowerment. This research argues with Kabeer (1999) that an analysis of women's empowerment should incorporate the three inter-related dimensions of resources, agency, and achievement.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

As pointed out by Kabeer (1999), resources are defined broadly to include not only access, "but also future claims, to both material and human, and social resources." (435) In this section, access to resources includes present access, future, potential, or unattained claims to financial, human, and social resources. In most societies, access to resources provides women with control over personal, household, and community decisions, making it an essential element to women

empowerment. An increased access to resources that were previously unavailable or to which they had a limited access, may initiate increased agency at the personal or community level, which can lead to women empowerment.

This research has indicated that the socio-economic environment of the research sites constrained the economic resources for most of the inhabitants and not only the women. The lack of employment opportunities in poor urban and semi-rural communities together with the relative isolation of some communities from large urban centers restricted most inhabitants to low skilled and low wage jobs. Men tend to overcome such constraints through manual occupations in their immediate vicinity or by traveling daily to nearby cities for, or in search of, employment. Women, on the other hand, suffer the most from such socio-economic constraints as they are often homebound owing to their homemaking roles and their lack of competing technical skills for available jobs.

Micro-enterprises or self-employment ventures thus provide many women with a generally inaccessible income opportunity. By supporting such businesses, SEED increases the women's access to financial resources. These data parallel the findings from an Indian case study of a women's cooperative by Datta and Gailey (2012). Their research indicated that in a social context where women's access to jobs in the formal economy is limited due to socio-economic constraints or cultural restrictions, a social enterprise can provide them with important access to financial resources.

This research attests that although both men and female micro-entrepreneurs interviewed face significant constraints in accessing financial capital to set up a business, women typically face more stringent financial constraints compared to men. In fact, just as men can use savings from their previous work as initial capital for the business, the women who participated in this study tend to rely on both their husbands' savings and external loans to start the business. A majority of them have received financial help from their husbands in order to start and maintain the business because the women themselves did not have a stable income source prior to establishing a self-employment venture.

In this respect, SEED's financial assistance in terms of loans is also particularly useful to women micro-entrepreneurs. By providing a reliable and affordable loan to its beneficiaries with no collateral attached, SEED plays a significant role in increasing the self-employment opportunities for many women in its operational sites.

This observation is further supported by the business income analysis and the individual respondent's accounts. These attest that access to financial capital for starting or developing an existing micro-enterprise increases women's chances of succeeding in their entrepreneurial ventures and gives them a certain level of financial independence from their husbands. On various occasions, women who have access to loan cycles from SEED do not need to depend on their husband's financial assistance to sustain their business.

Besides the gain in financial resources, the organization of the beneficiaries into small solidarity groups called satellites exerted a positive effect in enhancing the social capital for most respondents. SEED's beneficiaries gather every other week for loan payments, savings, and collection meetings at the satellite point in the community. In most cases, the satellite builds and strengthens camaraderie among the beneficiaries by creating a strong and mutually supportive group. Several respondents have asserted that these meetings provide them with an important networking opportunity as they share business ideas with fellow micro-entrepreneurs or connect them with other group members as potential clients. A similar situation has been previously indicated by Panganiban (1998) reporting cases of micro-entrepreneurs encouraging, supporting, and helping one another within solidarity groups.

Moreover, SEED's support helps enhance women's human capital. Complementary to providing microfinance capital, SEED offers free training to its beneficiaries to address business development requirements. Compulsory for every new member and re-loaner, the sessions are designed as interactive modules featuring short discussions of at least an hour long session (at most). These basic entrepreneurial courses cover topics aimed at enhancing women's financial literacy like loan repayment, separation of business and household income, over-indebtedness, bookkeeping, and other key elements. Such training sessions, accompanied by regular monitoring of entrepreneurs' income expenditures by SEED's staff members are judged as useful by most respondents. Many women report having successfully learned the basic financial skills needed for managing the business income and for the repayment of the loan in contractual terms. However, owing to time constraints, the research did not assess a possible longitudinal improvement of the beneficiaries' financial skills.

The identical approach of the social enterprise to the beneficiaries' human capital enhancement leaves more room for further improvement.

Although SEED's development plans provide a comprehensive list of social development training programs and assistance toward enhancing the beneficiaries' capabilities (such as family development services, social learning sessions, beneficiaries network associations and skills trainings), the social enterprise has been able to deliver only a limited number of them. Given the lack of resources and other internal needs, SEED has been obliged to prioritize the financial literacy training in its assistance to the beneficiaries.

Asked about potential or future expectations of the organization, many respondents report a need for a reliable insurance provision from SEED. Health and life insurance programs which in the past years were provided by SEED to its beneficiaries have been reportedly suspended because of internal problems. Even though the Philippine government has been trying to expand insurance coverage for the poor in recent years, the reality at the grassroots level shows that for many poor families, insurance needs remain largely unmet. Pressed by numerous bureaucratic procedures and often very limited medical assistance through government insurance schemes, many poor families prefer to rely on the affordable health and life insurance provided by social microfinance institutions and NGOs that offer better services.

Parallel to this, micro-entrepreneurs in production industries such as shoe making and ceramic mini factories have expressed the need for marketing skills to develop their businesses. It has been reported that many micro-entrepreneurs engaged in the production of goods face serious difficulties in expanding their businesses owing to the lack of access to potential markets. This has caused many micro-enterprises to fail. Women suffer the most in relation to market concerns because their social capital network tends to be limited to a small coterie of mostly female acquaintances. Although this particular need is not explicitly being addressed by the social enterprise, it nevertheless represents one of the beneficiaries' major unmet social needs. Hence, in supporting women's needs, SEED provides maximum social services to micro-entrepreneurs in poor urban and semi-rural communities while still leaving some social needs unmet.

In summary, SEED's social microfinance model of social enterprise generates a limited, though generally positive impact (Ogden 2011) on women micro-entrepreneurs by providing them with access to a variety of resources. This has allowed women in the barangays in Rizal province to set-up small businesses without financial assistance from their husbands. Beyond this, however, does such access to resources

increase the women's negotiating power and gender equality within the household, thereby changing existing social norms?

INCREASED AGENCY

Improving the economic outcomes of women's enterprises by an increase in their access to resources alone does not necessarily lead to women's empowerment (Kantor 2005). An effective way of measuring the women's empowerment process would therefore be to navigate the broader system of formal and informal norms, power, and social relations that constitute the economic and social fabric (Glinski et al. 2015).

For a social enterprise as an agent of social change to increase and ascertain its impact, it is necessary to give attention to the social aspect of the empowerment process. Among other factors, the element of gender relations within the household is significant for measuring the social aspects of the empowerment process. Because a key element of empowerment is the "ability to make choices" (Kabeer 1999), existing gender roles with power and gender relations within the household exert influence over female agency in entrepreneurial ventures. It follows that unequal power and gender relations within the household could negatively influence a female entrepreneur's development as she would likely face the double burden of combining household responsibilities with business imperatives. Conversely, a better negotiation of gender relations within the household would increase a female entrepreneur's agency or ability to make choices.

Consistent with Calás et al.'s (2009) theoretical framework, this research's interview results indicate that indeed an increased access to resources, in general, does not change existing social norms or cultural gender dynamics within the household. The traditional Filipino perception of gender role division within the household of the husband as a symbolic "head" and breadwinner paired with a homemaker wife (Hollnsteiner 1979, Eviota 1994, Illo 1994) still prevails in most of the respondents' households. Access to business capital and an increase in a woman's income do not automatically change her perceived role as a homemaker nor do they significantly change the power structure within the household. Existing gender roles and relations tend to prevail despite a woman's involvement or success in micro-enterprises. Women entrepreneurs, in general, still have the major responsibilities

for household chores, which leads to the double burden indicated at the outset. Moreover, most women entrepreneurs see their husbands as the “head” of the family with a clearly distinctive leadership position which appears attached to the breadwinner function. Even when they earn an income slightly similar or relatively higher than their husbands’ income, women still tend to expect their husbands to be the household “provider.” In turn, a woman’s earned income is perceived as secondary or subsidiary to the husband’s income.

Nonetheless, a notable discrepancy is perceived between the respondents’ answers and the perception of the woman and their husband’s respective roles within the household. Respondents’ answers implied that a husband is consistently a symbolic “head” of the household to which is attached the responsibility of being the breadwinner, whereas a wife’s primary function is to be the homemaker. Any productive activities within or outside the household initiated by a wife tends to be perceived as secondary, or in the women respondents’ own terms as *tulong* or help to a husband breadwinner.

In opposition of such a view, direct observation of the household’s gender relation dynamics, in congruence with the households’ cash flow analysis, suggests that women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to the household finances. As their contribution to the household income increased, the women, it seems, became more aware of the importance of their productive activities. To illustrate, 8 out of the 13 women interviewed, who have been in the business for a longer period of time and have higher incomes and returns—whether operating the business alone or with a husband associate—have no plans of leaving the business in the near future. Instead, when asked about their future business plans, many indicate something along the lines of a practical business plan, such as the purchase of a new asset or an increase in the loan amount. This does not seem to be the case of respondents with very small amounts of capital like the women in the rags business. They see their work as subsidiary to their husband’s separate production activity.

Hence, when the wife has increased access to resources, the proverbial assumption of a husband as being “breadwinner of the family” tends to become more symbolic than empirically real. This is consistent with Jeanne Frances Illo’s (1994) and Angela Davis’ (2012) observation that the traditional family model revolving around the mother as dependent homemaker, the father as breadwinner, with dependent children, does not reflect the reality. Women have always

been associated with some kind of income generating activities, albeit along the lines of the background production. Furthermore, contextual analysis indicates that in a socio-economic condition where men's low-paying occupation is marginal, a woman's involvement in self-employment activities becomes a survival imperative. With women playing an equally active role in the production realm, a negotiation of gender roles within the household appears as a practical possibility (Davis 2012). But do successful women entrepreneurs actually have bargaining power in such a negotiation?

This research highlights two fields of gender relation negotiation in the household between a female entrepreneur and a husband or partner. Female entrepreneurs receive sporadic "help" from the husbands for household chores. Such an entrance of the male into the domestic sphere tends to be, nevertheless, restricted in conformity with embedded gender roles. Accordingly, although both spouses may equally contribute to the household's income by engaging in different economic activities, the woman is still expected to carry out domestic responsibilities almost entirely. A husband's involvement in household chores would likely be perceived as assisting his wife's work rather than as shared responsibility. There is a common pattern where women entrepreneurs tend to rely more on other household members like children and relatives than on their husbands for domestic assistance. This research thus contends that this variation in negotiating gender relations in the household represents an alternative pattern, showing imbalanced terms embedded in a culture of women's dependency on males (Datta and Gailey 2012).

This is illustrated in the case of Ate Janette who operates a ceramics business together with her husband. Having three children, with the eldest female being fourteen years old, Ate Janette seems to have achieved an important gain in time management as her eldest daughter takes care of household chores every day before going to school at noon. Every morning Ate Janette can devote more of her time on ceramics work and other business-related commissions. It seems, however, that as children move into higher levels of formal schooling far from home or get a job outside the family home, they tend to spend less time on household work. Direct observation and the respondents' personal accounts indicate that college level children spend in general less time on household work than their younger siblings.

A second gender negotiation dynamic has been indicated to be

subjectively more practical and more advantageous to the female entrepreneur than the usual negotiation of a husband occasionally helping out with some household chores. This happens when a husband leaves his previous work to join the wife as a fulltime associate in the business or when together with the wife, the couple decides to start a self-employment venture. This particular negotiation tends to relieve the female entrepreneur's double burden by delegating some of her business responsibilities to the husband while she is involved in reproductive activities. However, even in such an arrangement, women micro-entrepreneurs tend to have limited bargaining power as to whether or not the husband should join her in the business. It appears that aside from the woman's increased business potential, the marginality of the husband's previous work also plays a role in prompting him to join the wife in the business or to set up a new business together.

This appears, for instance, in the case of Ate Aurora, who initially used to sell snacks in a rolling store at a nearby public school. After two years of operation, the small business started becoming financially stable, her husband resigned from his construction job to join her full time in the business. With a loan from SEED, they were able to improve their business environment and build a small wooden house for a carinderia where they sell home-cooked meals and operate a small convenience store. Today, Ate Aurora is in charge of the carinderia while her husband, using a pedal tricycle, has taken over her earlier business of selling snacks at the school and nearby areas. In this case, it clearly appears that it is the increased profit in the woman's business accompanied by the marginality of the husband's work which prompts the latter to join his wife in the business.

A similar pattern can be seen in the case of Ate Mila, who now owns a tailoring business inside the house and a small eatery at the corner of Cinco's main street in Baras. She started her tailoring business as early as 1993 before she was married. Lacking formal training in tailoring, she learned the skills from her seamstress-aunt. With another relative's assistance, she bought a sewing machine and started sewing clothes inside their family home while in her early twenties. She did not stop this work even after getting married. The lack of a qualifying education for better employment outside and the increasing domestic demands of a growing new family prompted her to remain home based. Despite temporary breaks because of illness, pregnancies, or other constraints, sewing became her main

economic activity inside the house to bring occasional but consistent extra income to the household. As her children grew older, and as she started benefitting from more personal time, she decided to diversify her business at home. With financial help from her husband and a loan, Ate Mila set up a small side business of serving home-cooked meals in a carinderia based in the main street near their house in Cinco. Shortly after the establishment of this new business, her husband resigned from his technician work in order to be involved full time in this business. Today, both spouses work together in the carinderia business, but the wife maintains her tailoring business at home. Normally, the wife cooks the home meals while the husband handles the carinderia the whole day.

A husband's involvement in a woman-run business has implications both for the household gender relations and for the micro-enterprise development. At the outset, a noticeable implication of spouses' joint business cooperation lies in providing a time management gain for the female entrepreneur. In most cases where both spouses are full-time associates in entrepreneurial activities, the female spouse feels freer to navigate between household responsibilities and business activities. With a husband involved in the business, most women feel less guilty for occasionally interrupting their business activities in response to household needs, knowing that their husbands will not see it as bothersome to the business.

Likewise, female entrepreneurs who were interviewed appear to successfully negotiate gender roles and boundaries within the household and in the business. In most cases where the husband is involved full time in the business with the wife, the double burden of production work and domestic chores appears to be shared to a greater degree between the two spouses. A pattern emerges showing that a husband will normally take the heavier workload or work over-time in the business (molding, crafting, selling, buying the products, carrying and delivering the merchandises, etc.), leaving the female spouse with more time to do household chores. This can be illustrated in the case of Ate Catherine, who owns a photo and printing shop together with her husband. Although both spouses work in the home-based business full-time, the husband takes on several responsibilities of selling in the shop, buying the products and establishing contacts with customers, while the wife devotes more time to the household chores even as she continues working in the business.

As for the decision-making patterns regarding general family

matters (i.e. livelihood, social relationships, purchasing of new assets, recreation, etc.), the pattern that emerges is one of collaboration. On various occasions, respondents indicate that family decisions are discussed and shared among the spouses. This finding is consistent with the results of various studies on the authority and decision-making patterns within Filipino families (Gonzales-Marbella 1978; Fabros et al. 1998). In general, it is argued that Filipino women have a share in household decision-making processes. However, a further question arises: Does an increase in access to resources give them greater bargaining power in general family concerns?

This does not seem to be the case. Contrary to a common assumption that an increase in a woman's access to resources increases a woman's decision-making power inside the household (Gonzales-Marbella 1978, Castro 2014), 11 out of 13 respondents (84 percent) have not reported any relative advantage in general household matters based on their increased income. Women micro-entrepreneurs argue that their respective success in micro-enterprises does not make a significant impact on household decision-making patterns since this is already often a shared process. What is different is their affirmation of having more freedom in deciding how to spend their micro-enterprise's earned income. Owing to time constraints, this research could not include comparative indicators between self-employed and non-working women in relation to analyzing women entrepreneurs' participation in household decision making.

In an attempt to promote evidence-based research featuring the impact of a woman's background (employment, education, location, etc.) on her participation in household decision-making in the Philippines, Lina V. Castro (2014) noted that employed Filipino women with cash earnings were more likely to participate in the household's decision-making than unemployed Filipino women. It was then asserted that a woman's occupational work or her substantial contribution to the household income served as a resource permitting her to increase her decision-making power within the household (Castro 2014; Gonzales-Marbella 1978). However, the association between a woman's occupation and her household decision-making patterns is not remarkable, as just 79 percent of employed Filipino women against 74 percent of unemployed women participate in household decision making (Castro 2014, 12).

A closer look at Castro's quantitative data indicates that in general Filipino women significantly participate in household decisions on

matters such as a woman's own health, major household purchases, purchases for daily household needs, and visits to the woman's family (Castro 2014). Castro's data further points out that irrespective of their occupation, about 66 percent of Filipino women experience joint decision making with their male spouses on matters concerning major household purchases, 45 percent make a joint decision regarding the woman's own health, and 32 percent make joint decisions about purchases for daily household needs (*ibid.*, 12). A noteworthy difference in this research is that, the majority of Filipino women who do not share jointly in household decision making are more likely to make such decisions alone, than are their husbands. In fact, 61 percent of women are more likely to decide alone in matters regarding the purchases of daily household needs against 6 percent of their husbands. The proportion shifts in favor of men when major household purchases are to be made: only 20 percent of women decide alone against 12 percent of men (*ibid.*). Consequently, although Filipino women's increased participation in the workforce or their contribution to the household income can increase to some degree their decision-making power within the household, such an increase is not very remarkable in matters regarding household spending where, in general, Filipino women already benefit from a relative advantage owing to their traditional role as the household's treasurer.

The particular model of SEED as social microfinance does not indicate any particular influence in women's participation in governance at the local community level. Whereas researchers (British Council 2017) have indicated that cooperative models of social entrepreneurship can increase women's voice in the community, it has been observed that SEED's support to women who were interviewed does not directly affect their involvement in the local community's affairs. In fact, since SEED's operational strategies are limited to the individual entrepreneur and solidarity groups' levels, they show little impact on the larger community's leadership.

It can thus be concluded that by increasing women's access to resources, the social enterprise model of SEED, as social microfinance institution, offers some degrees of increase—although limited—in female respondents' agency. This increase in women's access to income does not necessarily change existing and constraining social norms such as a gendered work division within the household, but it does offer women an opportunity for a renegotiation of gender relations within the household.

ACHIEVEMENTS

As suggested by Kabeer (1999), real achievements or outcomes are critical factors for comprehending women's empowerment. However, to understand better how the particular structure of SEED as a social microfinance and social enterprise empowers women, it is important to converse with women beneficiaries and understand empowerment from their own perspective. In measuring their achievements, primacy is given to the self-perception of women's empowerment.

Respondents have indicated that SEED's support to their businesses has been empowering because, above all, it gives them access to capital needed for their businesses and family needs. Based on interviews, this research agrees with Datta and Gailey's (2012) observation that the particular model of a social enterprise has empowered women in three different ways: enhanced economic security, development of entrepreneurial behavior; and increased contributions to the family finances. With the support of SEED, micro-entrepreneurs have been capable of strengthening their businesses and providing significant financial assistance to the family.

These findings contrast with a previous Philippine based research by Karlan and Zinman (2009) which found that expanding access to capital has in general no positive impact on female entrepreneurs. Using randomized, controlled trial methodologies in Metro Manila, Karlan and Zinman suggested that expanding access to credit increases profit for male but not for female entrepreneurs. Their study therefore called into question "the wisdom of microcredit policies that target women and micro-entrepreneurs to the exclusion of men and wage-earners." (Ibid., 16)

Conversely, this research's data argue that expanding access to credit does increase business profits for female micro-entrepreneurs who actively participated in the study. Notwithstanding that, owing to methodological and time constraints, the research did not include comparative data between male and female micro-entrepreneurs. Nonetheless it can be asserted that most female respondents have noted an increase in profit after a period of time between the initial and the current loan cycle from SEED. Whether the business is run by both spouses or by the female entrepreneur alone, an increase in or addition to a loan cycle is often accompanied by an increase in the business net profit and returns over a period of time. In other words, the longer an entrepreneur has been obtaining loans from SEED, the

more likely she is to have increased her gross business income and returns. This is consistent with personal accounts which indicate that many respondents have become more successful in the business and more financially independent with the help SEED loans over an extended period of time.

Admittedly, measuring the financial impact of a micro-enterprise has some inherent difficulties owing to classic endogeneity problems such as client self-selection and lender strategy based on critical unobserved inputs like client opportunity sets, preferences, and risks (Karlan and Zinman 2009, 2). It is worth noting, nonetheless, that SEED's financial support to women micro-entrepreneurs shows various degrees of positive effects on women and their overall household empowerment. Even where the outcome of such support might not always have a personal impact on individual women, it affects them indirectly by enhancing household members' capabilities.

The benefits of financial independence or an increase in a woman's income accrue more to the whole family, especially to the children. Women entrepreneurs allocate most of their financial gains to household spending which encompass the children's needs but rarely the women's own personal needs. As a respondent attests:

Nearly all of the business returns are used either to expand the business or to meet the household's needs. As the mother of the house, I must make sure that everyone's needs in the house are met. It is only after everyone's needs have been met, and if there is anything left over that I can consider buying something for myself, like a new dress or a new pair of shoes.

Other respondents shared this situation. Since most of the time the household's present and future financial needs are almost never fully addressed, the women entrepreneur's personal needs always come second. Since an increase in a woman's income is often directed at the household's and children's needs, the gained amounts do not necessarily address the female entrepreneur's personal needs. Nonetheless, although she does not benefit directly in terms of addressing her own wishes, she apparently finds satisfaction and feels rewarded in being able to contribute to the household's and children's well-being.

A corollary observation emerges in the analysis of the respondent's household consumption patterns. This indicates that

as enterprises become more sustainable owing to increased business income and returns, household consumption increases as well. This has raised concerns for low income households (Ogden 2011). The finding is consistent with Panganiban (1998) and Patel (2014) who show that, depending on the expenditure patterns, an increase in household consumption might have a positive effect on the overall well-being and empowerment of the household members. For most respondents, an increase in business returns and household income often leads to an increase in food consumption patterns and children's school related expenditures. This has particularly positive outcomes for poor families, where food, "is a first priority for human beings" (Patel 2014, 47). Expenditures in health and education are likewise considered to be productive changes affecting household members' well-being (Sen 1999). It can therefore be asserted, particularly for low-income households, that an increased household expenditure in food, education, and health can generate empowering effects.

CONSTRAINTS OF THE SOCIAL MICROFINANCE MODEL

Although evidence exists that involvement with a social enterprise increases profits and enhances human capabilities, other accounts contend that the broader social enterprise system can add constraining structures to women's empowerment. In this research, such existing and potential constraining structures to women's empowerment have emerged that are specifically related to the social microfinance model. Hence, the question will be in what ways does or can the social microfinance model become a constraining force to women's empowerment? Further, is there any way of reversing or eliminating those constraints?

CLIENT'S OVER-INDEBTEDNESS AND MULTIPLE BORROWING

The original objective of social microfinance was to get the poor out of poverty by giving them small loans and business training to start or develop their own entrepreneurial venture and generate their own income (Yunus 2007; Panganiban 1998). In reality, many poor micro-

entrepreneurs receiving financial loans from microfinance institutions do not have enough knowledge or entrepreneurial skills to bring themselves out of poverty. Consequently, they end up taking multiple loans to make ends meet (Ip 2012). This finding argues that a social enterprise or a social microfinance institution responding to women's income can become a part of the constraining structure when services—especially loans—are offered to entrepreneurs without sufficient prior investigation of beneficiaries' backgrounds and capabilities so as to offer appropriate trainings and business activity monitoring to overcome these difficulties.

Interviews with SEED staff members revealed that many new beneficiaries do not continue with the organization in the succeeding period after the first or second loan cycle because they often face a business bankruptcy right after the loan repayment. This is consistent with previous research in Zimbabwe indicating that many women-led micro-enterprise ventures assisted through microcredit often collapse within a short period of time because of inefficient management related to lack of awareness and education in the operation of business and market dynamics (Arhin et al. 2015). In this study, cases have been reported of micro-entrepreneurs who have joined the SEED organization without a prior strategic business plan and adequate training on market conditions; most of the time this results in poor business performance (ibid.). Furthermore, despite SEED's financial literacy training, some women end up being unable to accumulate successfully an increase in personal capital because of their lack of market knowledge and access to resources. As pointed out by Melisa Ip's (2012) criticisms of microfinance institutions, many poor women already have trouble living day to day and do not have the slightest clue as to how they should manage their finances.

A contributing factor to this is that many beneficiaries have been providing false business information to the social microfinance staff members in order to avail of credit for themselves. As a staff member admitted:

Because our loan policy prioritizes individuals with some business potential and assets, some women borrowed goods or merchandise from their friends or neighbors to make the loan officer believe that they already had a business operation that needs to be sustained by a loan. In this case, what happens is that it is only after they receive their loan

that they try to set up their own small business without proper training and understanding of the market. Even when they succeed in receiving a loan from the organization, these untrained entrepreneurs are more likely to register a business failure despite compulsory financial literacy training from SEED.

As indicated by many respondents, a direct negative consequence of a business failure and irregularity in loan payment is not only that it disqualifies them from potential access to credit from the same organization; it also affects their self-confidence in business as they develop a fear pattern regarding potential future credits. Interviews conducted with former SEED beneficiaries who had faced irregular loan repayment conditions resulting from a business failure reveal that often, they no longer intend to engage in future entrepreneurial ventures for fear of potential failure. Hence, as a SEED's staff member acknowledged, an adequate prior investigation of the beneficiaries' business background and potential can prevent the danger of providing loans to women or men that are not fully prepared for a business venture. Moreover, this should prompt the social microfinance, as the support organization, to provide an adequate response to the beneficiaries' needs.

Many poor families lead extremely complicated financial lives, partially because their income fluctuates widely from one day to the next (Forbes 2009). As previously seen, it is arguable that having access not only to credit but also to savings would bring benefits to the poor by helping them develop entrepreneurial ventures and stabilize their lives. However, several studies (Arhin et al. 2015; Chua and Tiongson 2012; Ip 2012) support the claim that uncontrolled access to credit could have the opposite result by pushing them further into poverty, dependence, and insurmountable debt.

The cluster of microfinance institutions and informal lenders' organizations in the communities where the research was conducted seems to encourage the multiple borrowing practice of many beneficiaries of SEED's services. Indeed, many respondents have reported having access to other formal microcredit organizations while also borrowing nonetheless from neighbors or making use of payday lenders who often charge exorbitant interest rates. This finding is consistent with both Chua and Tiongson (2012) and Karlan and Zinman (2009), whose research showed that in the Philippines, microcredit schemes seem to complement and not crowd-out informal lending mechanisms.

While researchers (Karlan and Zinman 2009) have indicated that some entrepreneurs can successfully engage in multiple borrowing and use informal credit as a strategy to absorb shocks, a more dominant pattern highlights that many micro-entrepreneurs have found themselves sinking deeper into poverty and over-indebtedness. A common pattern shows that they took an initial loan to develop a business venture, but then used the money for other purposes, whether for children's needs, some urgent medical fees, or for other household expenses. They end up taking up multiple loans from other institutions or informal lenders just to repay the current loan within the terms of the agreement while trying to make ends meet. A loan dependency pattern therefore follows where micro-entrepreneurs continuously take on new loans to repay old ones. Perhaps this explains why despite an apparent continuous increase in business income and returns, some entrepreneurs who were interviewed appear to still be stuck at a modest subsistence level with no significant increase in household or business assets. In fact, for many micro-entrepreneurs a business portfolio is significantly made up of multiple loans.

DOES THE ORGANIZATION'S SUPPORT REINFORCE GENDER STEREOTYPES?

It appears that providing credit to women can serve as a means to challenge existing gender inequalities (Datta and Gailey 2012; Haugh and Talwar 2016; Glinski et al. 2015). However, as Arhin et al. (2015) attest, "designing and providing credit to women presents major challenges at the intra-household level and wider society." (902) It has been previously observed that increased income does not necessarily enhance a woman's agency in terms of development as it can sometimes decrease her empowerment (Kantor 2005). The social context indicates that because it is the ability or failure to participate in household decision-making that renders a woman empowered or disempowered, it results that an increased income may decrease her empowerment when it is not accompanied with increased decision-making power (ibid.). This is, for instance, the case when a woman's increased income leads to increased relationship strains and controls due to a husband's jealousy.

Research findings further indicate that the social microfinance approach to women's empowerment tends to overlook men's

involvement in women-led entrepreneurial ventures. Although, in reality, as Arhin et al. (2015) have shown, women's lives are embedded in relations with men at the household level, "the empowerment discourse of microfinance programs often sees them as separate entities." (Arhin et al. 2015, 902) Indeed, SEED's support to women beneficiaries appears not to take into account existing social norms and relations embedded in women entrepreneurs' environment. This is noticeable in the apparent preference for working with female spouses without including the husbands' responsibilities. Lacking are existing policies and trainings that would incorporate entrepreneurs' husbands and partners into the organization's empowerment schemes. This failure to incorporate men into the development discourse often weakens the empowerment potential of the credit schemes (Arhin 2015).

In fact, a failure to effectively address household gender relations in the social microfinance development schemes targeting women may also overlook the double burden faced by many female micro-entrepreneurs and its impact on the development of their entrepreneurial ventures. A major constraint for many women micro-entrepreneurs is time management because they have to face a double burden of combining self-employment imperatives with household obligations. In this context, an increase in a woman's access to credit without an understanding of household gender relations dynamics may result in increasing women's time related constraints and in weakening the empowerment potential of the development scheme.

Moreover, it has been observed that challenges associated with the repayment of loans may worsen women's subordinate position to men (Arhin et al. 2015). In conformity with microfinance regulation, and before issuing a loan to a micro-entrepreneur, SEED requires a household breadwinner's endorsement and warranty that the loan will be paid in case the beneficiary is unable to repay the loan. As in most cases it is men, more than women, who have stable outside employment, the men normally become the main endorsers of their spouse's credit application. This situation arguably embodies the potential for worsening women's subordination (Illo 1994). In case of challenges surrounding the repayment of loans, women tend to rely on their husbands' salary for settling an outstanding loan. Consequently, as some respondents have indicated, to avoid a husband's blaming her for a potential business failure and loan repayment difficulties, a woman may decide to consult or depend on her husband's advice in major

business strategies. While discussing and sharing business ideas with a male spouse might have a positive impact on the business development, it carries with it the potential for subordination represented in unequal or even abusive marital relations.

Another major constraint to women-led self-employment is a gender-oriented entrepreneurial skill framework based on gender stereotypes in education and traditional gender-role socialization patterns (Turpin and Lorentzen 1991). Inadequate assessment of the social context that supports such structural inequality appears to constrain SEED's effectiveness in promoting gender empowerment.

UNTARGETED POOR WOMEN

Although SEED's social development program has a provision for supporting poor individuals and families with no business experience or evident potential by offering them business training and a small loan at zero interest rate, much of the program's attention focuses on women already engaged in some form of economic activity. The preferential option for women with good business records and potential appears to have a practical entrepreneurial sustainability motive because it ensures that the credit will be repaid within the agreed terms and have an impact on the micro-enterprise. However, the same preference indicates that the very poor—who often have no business assets or prior training—may be neglected, with no potential access to the resources provided by the social enterprise (Arhin et al. 2015).

CONCLUSION

“Development brings freedom, provided it is development of people. But people cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves.” (Nyerere 1974, 82) Echoing such a view, development paradigms have been designed in such a way that they would provide people the needed capabilities to make choices and develop themselves (Sen 1999). It is in this perspective that social entrepreneurship in general, or social microfinance in particular, aims to empower mostly women but also men by enhancing their capabilities.

This paper aimed therefore to determine the impact of a social enterprise's support to women micro-entrepreneurs. It has been

perceived that by increasing women's access to resources the social microfinance scheme does not necessarily change existing social norms and social relations. However, in this case study, SEED's support has an overall positive—although limited—impact on its women beneficiaries by increasing their agency and capabilities. Conversely, it is also observed that the specific model of SEED in giving social microfinance or social enterprise support to women's income can also reinforce existing gender stereotypes either through certain regulations or practices, or by not explicitly challenging the existing unequal power relations within the household. Moreover, it has been perceived that a social microfinance's development scheme can become part of the constraining structure when loans are offered without a comprehensive analysis of the beneficiaries' socio-economic context. This has been identified as creating potential risk for over-indebtedness and multiple borrowing which pushes women entrepreneurs further into dependency and poverty.

The research has established various degrees of relationships with existing literature on social entrepreneurship in general or social microfinance in particular. The findings of this research broaden the understanding of the theoretical framework by presenting a case study's evidence generally confirming previous findings on the subject. However, it is also significant that the evidence presented counteracts and expounds on existing literature thus calling for further research on the subject.

At the outset, this research paralleled an already rich literature on the constraints to women entrepreneurs in the Philippines (Carroll 1965; Gonzales-Marbella 1978; Cotaoco 1997; Malaya 2006; Marcucci 2011; Ampel-Milagrosa 2014). At the same time, it has enhanced such literature by adding lesser known constraints faced by women micro-entrepreneurs supported by a social enterprise in general or a social microfinance in particular such as over-indebtedness and continuous financial dependency to husbands (Karlan and Zinman 2009; Datta and Gailey 2012).

The discussion of gender roles within micro-entrepreneurs' households echoes findings revealed in the extensive literature on Filipino household's gender role division (e.g. Rosaldo 1974; Hollnsteiner 1979; Eviota 1994; Honculada 1994; Illo 1994). This research, however, has also clarified recent queries (GEM 2006–2007; Racelis 2017) or anecdotal evidence suggesting that Filipino women start recruiting their husbands after the business has become stabilized

with higher loan amounts entailed. Confirming the observation that some husbands join their wives in micro-enterprises after the business has stabilized, this research indicated that such a move is also related to the nature of the husband's work.

This research has particular relevance in expanding the growing literature (Kabeer 1999; Kantor 2005; Haugh and Tawal 2016; Ip 2012; Datta and Gailey 2012; Arhin et al. 2015) on the impact of social entrepreneurship and social microfinance in empowering women entrepreneurs. Although, as an entrepreneurial way to address social needs (Mair et al. 2006; Austin 2006), social entrepreneurship has been very attractive in recent years to many of those engaged, its ultimate impact on the beneficiaries and the society, however, has yet to be established (Masetti 2011). Departing from a traditional appraisal of social entrepreneurship and the social microfinance modus operandi (Yunus 2007; Datta and Gailey 2012), recent critics have questioned the claim that in its social microfinance approach, social entrepreneurship can empower the poor and in particular women (Kantor 2005; Ip 2012; Karlan and Zinman 2009; Arhin et al. 2015).

In the Philippine context, a quantitative study conducted by Karlan and Zinman (2009) on the impact of microfinance in empowering women entrepreneurs has questioned the social microfinance wisdom of prioritizing women entrepreneurs in its programs. This stemmed from their finding that an increase in access to credit had no effect on women but did have a positive effect on men entrepreneurs (Karlan and Zinman 2009). While the randomized sample methodology used by Karlan and Zinman and their results have been disputed by many social entrepreneurs and microfinance apologists (Forbes 2009), very little research has been conducted to clarify or question some of their claims (Chua and Tiongson 2012; Castro 2014).

Drawing from a qualitative analysis investigation, the findings of this research add some light to Karlan and Zinman's findings, and engage in a larger global conversation on the empowerment effects of social microfinance and social entrepreneurship in general. For instance, this study's findings break with Karlan and Zinman's claims that an increased access to credit had no effect on women. This study's findings indicated that many women micro-entrepreneurs who have benefitted to some degree from the access to resources from SEED—financial, social, and human—registered an increase in business income and returns after a period of time. Furthermore, an increase in women's access to resources has also brought significant benefits to household

members and to children in particular (Yunus 2007). However, the findings also echoed some of the most vocal critics (Kantor 2005; Arhin et al. 2015) who conclude that an increase in credit access for women does not necessarily empower women beneficiaries since it can also constrain their empowerment in certain ways.

In conclusion, the research findings are in consonance with recent cutting edge research on social entrepreneurship and social microfinance (Glinski et al. 2015; British Council 2017). It is suggested that in order to ensure a larger social impact, both social entrepreneurship in general and social microfinance in particular need to take into account the realm of social norms and relations. This refers especially to the interaction between the female entrepreneur and male partner in the family setting, one that may spill over positively or negatively into the business enterprise. Hence, three potential directions for future research emerge. In order to have a better grasp of the extent of women's empowerment through social microfinance, researches need to provide a qualitative comparative analysis of men and women entrepreneurs' empowerment processes. Moreover, while this case study has covered a typical model of social microfinance in empowering women in the Philippines, future research needs to broaden this analysis by including different models of social entrepreneurship in the Philippines and in other countries. Finally, in order for social entrepreneurship researchers to broaden their understanding of social norms and relations, there is a need for further investigations to include comparative data between cultures and nations showing how cultural similarities and differences can lead to similar or different empowerment outcomes within the same social entrepreneurship model.

NOTES

- 1 A Philippine government research report points out that poverty incidence of the Calabarzon region is relatively lower compared to the national average, with Rizal province, alongside Cavite and Laguna, having the least problem with poverty (Calabarzon regional development plan 2011–2016).
- 2 This is corroborated by recent statistical data showing that five of the nine basic sectors consisting of farmers, fisherfolk, children, self-employed, unpaid family workers, and women belonging to poor families had a higher poverty incidence than the general population, estimated at 21.6 percent in 2015 (Philippine Statistics Authority 2017).
- 3 See: <http://rizalprovince.ph>

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