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## **Ecofeminist Perspectives and Familial Dynamics: Exploring Women’s Roles in Environmental Sustainability and the Filipino Concept of “Ate”**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This essay explores women’s role in environmental sustainability drawing from the Filipino concept of “Ate.” Through a contrapuntal analysis, it unveils the convergence and divergence between women’s roles in formal environmental advocacy and as caregivers within the family, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these roles. Examining birth order in Filipino culture reveals the early-age responsibilities, particularly for first-born females, highlighting their leadership, teaching, and caregiving roles. The study underscores women’s significant role as environmental stewards, both locally and globally, aligning with the biblical concept of overseeing and caring for the Earth.*

*The exploration of women as promoters of welfare, within Filipino culture and through environmental protection efforts, demonstrates diverse contributions to community and planetary well-being. The study intertwines biblical perspectives with cultural insights, emphasizing shared responsibility for Earth stewardship. In conclusion, it calls for a comprehensive*

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*understanding of women's contributions in environmental and familial spheres, recognizing their pivotal and interconnected roles. As the world faces urgent environmental challenges, leveraging the diverse perspectives and actions of women emerges as crucial for sustainable and equitable solutions. The study contributes valuable insights to discussions on gender roles, environmentalism, and cultural contexts, advocating for the recognition and promotion of women's roles in shaping a sustainable future.*

**Keywords:** *ecofeminism, environmental sustainability, gender roles, caregiving, "ate" concept, formal advocacy*

## 1. Introduction

In recent times, the Filipino woman has been celebrated and glorified in both local and international fashion magazines. She is often hailed as a symbol not just of Asian elegance and beauty but also of a modern, liberated form of womanhood, striving to embody both avantgarde qualities and, if possible, a fusion of the traditional "Maria-Clara-ish" persona, as described by Carmen Guerrero Nakpil (Tagumpay-Castillo and Hilomen-Guerrero 1969).

The intriguing trait exhibited by the Filipino woman sparks my curiosity to delve into the roles women play in promoting environmental sustainability. This involves comparing worldwide views on formal advocacy and initiatives with the age-old Filipino notion of "Ate" – the eldest sister or first-born daughter undertaking caregiving duties within the family. The examination delves into the points of alignment and deviation between these two frameworks, highlighting the various ways in which women actively contribute to both caregiving and leadership roles.

On the one hand, this essay on environmental sustainability highlights women as active participants in formal advocacy, engaging in projects that transcend familial boundaries and impact communities

and ecosystems. On the other hand, the Filipino concept of “*Ate*” centers on informal leadership and responsibilities within the family, particularly in domestic spheres and sibling care symbolizing an elder sister, extends its nurturing presence to environmental care and sustainability. In this context, “*Ate*” embodies the responsibility and guidance needed to foster a harmonious relationship with the environment. As an older sister to the principles of ecological well-being, “*Ate*” encourages practices that prioritize the health and longevity of our planet, promoting a sustainable and caring approach towards the environment.

While both paradigms underscore the importance of women in caregiving roles, the essay emphasizes broader environmental sustainability, showcasing formal empowerment and advocacy. In contrast, the “*Ate*” concept embodies familial dynamics, featuring informal leadership and responsibilities within the household. This contrapuntal analysis reveals the nuanced intersection between gender roles, responsibilities, and cultural contexts, providing a comprehensive understanding of women’s diverse contributions to both environmental and familial spheres. The study contributes to ongoing discussions on gender roles and environmentalism, offering insights into the intricate balance between formal advocacy and informal leadership within diverse cultural settings.

Le Duc (2018) argues that environmental degradation is a pressing concern for the Catholic Church. In his article, he highlights efforts by Church leaders and theologians to address ecological issues, rooted in biblical scholarship and teachings, especially in response to historical criticisms, such as Lynn White Jr.’s claim of Christianity’s anthropocentric role in the ecological crisis (Le Duc 2018).

Le Duc (2017) further argues that the promotion of environmental sustainability within the religious context in Asia necessitates an approach that considers spiritual dimensions inherent to the Asian religious worldview, addressing not only sociological and ethical aspects but delving into the deepest aspects of human reality. For Le Duc (2017), religions offer a framework for assessing actions in the context of ultimate desires for authentic happiness, requiring a creative

examination of millennia-old traditions to effectively contribute to environmental sustainability without compromising their integrity.

In this article, I aim to delve deeper into Le Duc's perspectives on environmental stewardship in Asia. As the world faces increasing environmental challenges, it is imperative to underscore the pivotal role of women in actively seeking sustainable solutions. From formal advocacy initiatives to grassroots movements, women have emerged as influential leaders and caregivers, actively contributing to the preservation of our planet. This article aims to explore the multifaceted dimensions of women's involvement in environmental care, transcending international boundaries to delve into the specific context of the Philippines.

At the global level, women have spearheaded campaigns and initiatives addressing pressing environmental issues (Shinbrot et al. 2019), ranging from climate change mitigation to biodiversity conservation. Their leadership in formal advocacy has proven instrumental in shaping policies and fostering international cooperation for a sustainable future (Alonso-Población and Siar 2018). As the urgency of environmental concerns continues to mount (Pope Francis 2015), understanding the diverse roles women play on a global scale becomes imperative.

Zooming into the Philippine context, this article will intricately examine the local manifestation of women's environmental stewardship, with a particular focus on the cultural concept of "*Ate*." In Filipino families, the eldest sister, or "*Ate*," traditionally assumes caregiving roles and responsibilities. This unique familial dynamic intertwines with the broader global narrative, showcasing how women's roles in environmental care find expression within the intricate tapestry of Filipino culture.

This article seeks to provide a simple overview of the reality of women's environmental leadership, gradually narrowing the focus to the specific and culturally rich context of the Philippines. Through this exploration, we aim to unravel the various layers of women's contributions, from global advocacy to local caregiving, in the ongoing endeavor to safeguard our planet for future generations.

## 2. Birth Order in Filipino Culture: Sibling Roles and Responsibilities

Among Filipinos, the family is the source of identity, support, and focus of one's primary duty (Roseberry-McKibbin 1997). Children in the Philippines are distinguished by birth order and sex in a manner which has no counterpart in English: *ate*, the eldest girl; *ditse*, second oldest girl; *sanse*, third eldest girl; *kuya*, eldest boy; *diko*, second oldest boy; and *sangko*, third eldest boy (Stoodley 1967). Individuals are expected to sacrifice for the good of the family, like the older siblings will typically spend much of their salaries for the education and support of younger siblings. In terms of childcare, older siblings (especially the girls) are usually caretakers of younger ones (Stoodley 1967).

Responsibility training varies according to birth order and greater responsibilities and expectations are typically issued to first-borns, especially the females (Liway et al. 1998). Thus, first-born child engages in leadership, teaching, and helping roles, particularly the older sister (Howe et al. 2014). They are expected to help with household chores including looking after their younger sibling/s. In the context of Filipino families, it is observed that older sisters are more inclined to assume caretaking and supportive roles compared to their older brothers (White et al. 2014; Kramer 2014; Kramer and Hamilto 2019). Parental reports indicate that boys tend to display more aggressive behavior towards their siblings than girls during childhood (Dirks et al. 2019).

However, gender or age gap differences in sibling relationships in early childhood are generally inconsistent. As second-born siblings progress in cognitive, linguistic, and social competencies during their early years, they tend to adopt more active roles in interactions with their siblings. This may involve initiating games or imparting knowledge to their younger siblings (Howe 2016). Consequently, the initial power imbalance that exists among siblings appears to diminish as they age, leading to more equitable interactions.

In the Philippines, many children shoulder responsibilities at an early age, especially when various obligations arise within the

family, necessitating parents to engage in economic activities. Consequently, children are trained and involved in household duties, with a particular emphasis on daughters. Elders often impart the wisdom that “a child is considered good when they know how to assist their younger siblings, fulfill chores, and contribute to the basic needs of their family members.”

The delegation of responsibilities to children stems from the family’s need to collaborate in maintaining their livelihoods. Assigning these tasks to children, especially girls, is deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric, with the belief that a child’s ability to support and actively participate in home-related responsibilities reflects their moral character. In traditional Filipino culture, a child’s proficiency in caring for younger siblings, completing household chores, and aiding in the family’s needs is regarded as a commendable virtue.

This practice reflects the interconnectedness and interdependence within Filipino families, where collective effort is crucial for the overall well-being of the household. In essence, children are seen not merely as recipients of care but as active contributors to the family unit, instilling values of cooperation, responsibility, and compassion from a young age. For this reason, children must be trained and involve in household duties accordingly, particularly the daughters. Elders would say that a “child is good when one knows how to help the younger sibling, fulfil chores, and help provide for the basic needs of their family members” (Durbrow et al. 2001).

### **3. “Ate” Chronicles: Navigating Leadership and Responsibility in Sibling Dynamics**

My younger siblings often refer to me as their “Ate” since I am the eldest and the firstborn in our family. Embracing the title of “Ate” comes with a profound sense of responsibility, as it entails being their designated “overseer” – a role of dominance and leadership within the familial hierarchy. As the “Overseeing Ate,” I acknowledge this responsibility with a sense of accountability and approach it with courage. This role requires me to perform my duties with a combination of tough love and unwavering commitment.

As the eldest sibling, my role transcends that of a mere sister; I am a guiding figure dedicated to the welfare and development of my younger siblings. The title “*Ate*” holds a profound meaning, signifying a commitment to nurture, protect, and offer guidance. This responsibility has cultivated within me a profound sense of duty, contributing to the creation of a familial atmosphere where support and leadership harmoniously coexist.

The challenges inherent in being the “*Ate*” are embraced as opportunities for personal and familial growth. Leading by example, I endeavor to establish a nurturing environment where my siblings can not only survive but truly thrive. This role entails more than just overseeing; it involves fostering an atmosphere that encourages individuality, learning, and mutual support. Through my continuous efforts, I aim to embody the essence of the “*Ate*” role, fostering a familial bond that becomes a source of strength and encouragement for each member.

My character of being an “overseer” portrays as caretakers of my younger siblings and serves as the right hand and next in command over the entire household if my parents are away from home. Being the right hand of my parents tested my ability to protect, guide, or watch over their actions and behaviors.

#### **4. Empowering Eco-Leadership: Filipino ‘*Ate*’ and Environmental Stewardship in Sibling Dynamics**

In the intricate tapestry of family dynamics, the role of the “*Ate*” extends beyond a simple title; it is a mantle of leadership and guidance. This position involves not only overseeing but actively nurturing the well-being and development of younger siblings, embracing the responsibility with a commitment to family welfare. The essence of the “Overseeing *Ate*” is encapsulated in a delicate balance of tough love and unwavering commitment. To effectively fulfil the duties associated with the title, a unique blend of firmness and dedication becomes crucial.

The commitment to family welfare is a cornerstone of the “*Ate’s*” role, reaching beyond the conventional boundaries of oversight. It evolves into the creation of an atmosphere where support and leadership seamlessly coexist, establishing a familial environment where each member thrives. Embracing challenges takes on a transformative dimension for the “*Ate.*” Rather than obstacles, these challenges become catalysts for personal and familial growth. It reflects a resilience and adaptability that characterize the essence of the role.

Central to the “*Ate’s*” mission is the creation of a nurturing environment. This goes beyond the conventional notion of oversight, delving into the realms of fostering individuality, promoting learning, and encouraging mutual support. The “*Ate*” becomes a catalyst for the development of a familial bond – a source of strength and encouragement for each member, echoing the timeless values of leadership, responsibility, and love.

## **5. Ecofeminism: Woman-Nature Connections**

The resounding message from the 4th U.N. World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in September 1995, as articulated by Hillary Rodham Clinton, is that human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights once and for all. It is crucial not to forget that among these rights are the right to speak freely and the right to be heard (Aragon and Miller 2012). Clinton’s message carries significant implications for the role of women in environmental sustainability. By asserting that human rights are inherently linked to women’s rights, and vice versa, the statement underscores the importance of recognizing and empowering women as key agents in environmental conservation.

Aragon and Miller (2012) contend that women play a crucial role in overseeing natural resources at the familial and communal levels, and they are disproportionately impacted by environmental deterioration. For Aragon and Miller (2012), women are responsible for managing water sources, fuel, and food, as well as overseeing both forests and agricultural landscapes. In developing countries, women

contribute from 60 to 80 percent of food production. However, restrictive inheritance laws and local traditions often hinder their ability to own or lease land, and they face obstacles in obtaining loans or insurance. From international summits like the 1992 UN Earth Summit to grassroots movements such as India's Chipko movement and Kenya's Green Belt Movement, the significance of women's voices and perspectives in sustainable development has been underscored.

According to Cate (2012), women globally are crucial to sustainable development, peace, and security. As the primary resource managers for their families in many parts of the world, their active involvement in addressing and adapting to climate change is vital. Women, deeply reliant on natural resources for necessities like food, fuel, and shelter, can be disproportionately affected by environmental changes. Their pivotal roles in managing natural resources, biodiversity, and ecosystems make their experiences and perspectives essential for formulating sustainable development policies and actions at all levels, aiming to ensure a healthy planet for future generations.

Given women's central role in managing natural resources for their families and their vulnerability to environmental changes, their active involvement in sustainable development becomes imperative. Ensuring women's right to speak freely and be heard not only promotes gender equality but also acknowledges the unique insights and experiences women bring to environmental policymaking. This holistic approach recognizes that advancing women's rights is integral to achieving comprehensive and effective strategies for environmental sustainability, ultimately contributing to a healthier planet for present and future generations (ESCAP 2017).

Ecofeminists contend that there is a direct link between women and nature, with the female being connected to nature and immanence, while the male is associated with culture and transcendence (Peracullo 2015). Both women and nature are marginalized, exploited, and subjected to control. Addressing the societal issue of sexism requires challenging the patriarchal perception and treatment of nature. The unfortunate outcomes of linking women and nature have affected both humanity and the environment. Despite this, some feminists propose a

positive transformation by embracing feminine values like care, openness, and nurturing (Birkeland 1993).

## **6. The Role of “Ate” in Parallel with Biblical Women as Overseers**

The term “overseer” encompasses the responsibility of overseeing and guiding others, extending beyond observation to active engagement in directing activities. This role involves a dynamic engagement with tasks and individuals, emphasizing meticulous observation, thoughtful guidance, and effective direction.

The concept of Filipino women being the “Ate” of the environment, overseeing the sustainability and growth of all God’s creation, draws a profound parallel to the biblical narrative in Genesis. In Genesis 1:28, both men and women are given the responsibility to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and exercise dominion over all living things. This divine charge can be understood as an invitation to be caretakers, humble leaders, and promoters of welfare, emphasizing a harmonious relationship with the Earth despite the challenges humanity faces.

The biblical passage from Genesis signifies humanity’s stewardship over the environment, entailing both the privilege and responsibility of caring for God’s creation. The comparison to being caretakers aligns with the idea that women, as overseers of the Earth, are entrusted with the task of nurturing and preserving the environment and its resources. Describing women as humble leaders reflects the nuanced approach needed in fulfilling the divine mandate. Humility implies recognizing the interconnectedness of all living things and acknowledging the Earth as a shared home that requires cooperative and respectful stewardship. Women, in their role as humble leaders, are called to guide with a sense of reverence for the intricate balance of nature.

In the context of Filipino culture, the term “Ate,” denoting the eldest sister, reflects the overseer’s dedication to the well-being and assistance of the family. The biblical concept of the overseer

corresponds to the portrayal of a “*Ate*,” underscoring the duty to supervise and lead a community with strength of character, coupled with nurturing and compassionate care. This characteristic is exemplified in the numerous narratives of women in the Bible. Among the many remarkable women leaders in the Bible is Deborah. Characterized by her immense faith and bravery, Deborah fearlessly stood up for her convictions even in the face of opposition. When the Israelites faced oppression from the Canaanites, Deborah exhibited exceptional leadership by guiding them into battle and securing victory over their adversaries.

Her story in the book of Judges portrays her as a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, leading Israel during a crucial period. Notably, she held court under the Palm of Deborah, resolving disputes for the Israelites in the hill country of Ephraim (Judges 4:4-5). Deborah’s character serves as a compelling illustration of a resilient and audacious woman of faith (Judges 4:4). Relating her character to environmental care, one can draw inspiration from Deborah’s proactive stance in leading her people and resolving conflicts. Applying this to environmental concerns, it underscores the importance of courageous leadership and proactive decision-making to address and overcome challenges related to environmental issues. Deborah’s example encourages a sense of responsibility and stewardship for the well-being of the community and the environment, reflecting the values of strength, courage, and faith in the context of environmental care.

Another woman with an exemplary character is Esther who shows great courage by risking her life for her people and navigating palace dangers with bravery. Despite her elevated status, she remains humble, devoted to God, and displays selflessness in saving her people. Esther’s wisdom and obedience to God transform her from an orphan to a revered heroine in biblical history (Esther 2:5-7; 4:1-17; 6:1-11; 10:2 ).

While the biblical story of Esther is not explicitly focused on environmental care, one can draw metaphorical parallels that emphasize the importance of courage, responsibility, and stewardship for the well-being of communities and the broader world. Esther’s courage in

confronting King Xerxes and revealing a plot against her people can be likened to the bravery needed to address environmental challenges (Esther 1:1-22, Esther 2:1-23, Esther 5:1-14).

In the context of environmental care, Esther's selflessness and compassion for her people can inspire a similar commitment to the well-being of the planet and future generations. Her loyalty to her roots and willingness to sacrifice personal comforts align metaphorically with the need for individuals to prioritize sustainable practices, even in the face of potential sacrifices. Esther's wisdom in navigating the complex political landscape of the palace reflects the importance of intelligence and strategic thinking in addressing environmental issues (Esther 4:3; 8:5-17). Just as Esther used her limited influence to bring about positive change, individuals can use their resources and influence to advocate for environmental conservation and sustainable policies. While the socio-political situation pertaining to Esther's context is not related to environmental concerns, the themes of courage, responsibility, compassion, and strategic thinking in this narrative can serve as metaphors to encourage individuals to take proactive roles in preserving and nurturing the environment.

Another woman in the Bible that has a remarkable character worth immolating is Ruth. Ruth embodies virtues such as faithfulness, loyalty, and love. Her selflessness and compassion are evident in her decision to stay with her mother-in-law, Naomi, even after the death of her husband. Ruth's commitment to caring for those around her, as seen in her famous declaration, "thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God," (Ruth 1: 16) serves as an inspiring example of goodness. In the context of environmental care, we can draw parallels by emphasizing the importance of loyalty and commitment to nurturing our surroundings, treating the Earth as our shared home, much like Ruth's commitment to her chosen family and faith.

Similarly, in the Philippines, the pivotal roles of women, commonly addressed as "*Ate*," in overseeing family resources highlight the critical need to advocate for gender equality in environmental resource management. This underscores the significance of empowering women in their capacity as guardians of the environment (Illo 1991), as they actively contribute to sustainable practices that

enhance the welfare of both their families and the care for our “common home.”

In the realm of environmental sustainability, Filipino women, who may be deeply connected to natural resources for their families’ well-being, can find empowerment and acknowledgment in their role as stewards of the environment, or in Filipino the “*Ate ng Kalikasan*” (Sister of the Environment). Moreover, the call for the right to speak freely and be heard resonates strongly in a cultural context where women’s voices have historically played crucial roles in community decisions. Recognizing and amplifying the perspectives of Filipino women in environmental policies not only contributes to sustainable development but also reflects a commitment to inclusive and equitable practices that benefit both individuals and the broader community.

Several Filipina women actively contribute to environmental welfare. Anna Oposa leads the Save Philippine Seas group, focusing on coastal and marine protection through education and community projects (Ashoka Fellow 2022). Sanne Sevig manages the Siargao Recycling Art Studio, turning trash into eco-friendly items (De La Cruz 2016). Joanna Sustento uses her Typhoon Haiyan survival story to garner public support for climate change (Voices of Youth 2019). Desiree Danos Lee, Greenpeace Southeast Asia’s Climate Justice Campaigner, engages in climate policy and grassroots activism (Tan 2022). Actress and blogger Saab Magalona advocates for renewable energy and volunteers with Greenpeace (Fernandez 2017). Former Environment Secretary Gina Lopez emphasizes a “green economy” and urges unity among environmental advocates for sustainable development, highlighting the crucial role of Filipino women in environmental care (DENR 2024).

Like Lopez, in the global community there are several women that exemplify the role of “*Ate ng Kalikasan*” (Sister of the Environment). These women are actively involved in initiatives promoting environmental conservation and sustainable development. For example, Laura Riavitz, a Marine Biologist from Austria residing in San Juan, La Union, Philippines, contributes to reef ecology and water conservation through mangrove planting and educating locals about avoiding plastic use in wet markets. Initially, Gela Petines, aspiring to

be a sports doctor, shifted to environmental science, developing a passion for the ocean during coral reef research. She founded the skin-diving organization ISDA, advocating for marine conservation and empowering fisherfolk.

Tina Antonio, a volunteer for Coastal Underwater Research Management Actions and president of La Union Conventions and Visitors Bureau, organizes beach clean-ups, advocates against single-use plastics, and plans sustainable livelihood projects for La Union Soul, a community-driven ecotourism movement. Camille Pilar, through her coffee shop Clen Beach in La Union, promotes eco-friendly products like reusable tumblers and bamboo or steel straws. Marja Abad, co-founder of the Siargao Environmental Awareness Movement, addresses Siargao's waste management issues and raises awareness among residents through placards with catchy statements like "Plastic is Not Fantastic" (De La Cruz 2018).

Aleksandra Koroleva, a Russian environmental activist effort to study, preserve trees as botanist in her region, and to protect citizens from dangerous environmental pollution. She also urges everyone, whether children, teachers, officials, activists not only to think but to do something concrete and humbling (Milovanov n.d.). Elma Reyes, a fisherman in coastal municipality of Alabat, Quezon and a survivor of Typhoon Glenda, led community mobilization and started the Human Rights and Climate Change Petition (Fernandez 2017).

Climate change affects everyone, but women often bear more of the crisis. Since women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, Zandice Gumede, the first female Mayor of Durban, South Africa challenges women to likely be educated as scientists or represented on committees that make decisions about environmental sustainability (The Philippine Star 2017).

Women must be informed as well as be educated about alternative methods in the household purposes like cooking, cleaning, also in farming, family planning, and waste disposal. Their collective ideas and actions in addressing resource management problems is another instance of a general strategy to strengthening their lives as well as the environment (Times Reporter 2009).

The Barefoot College (2009) empower women particularly the grandmothers through solar engineer training since they have a longer history in the community and have less incentive to migrate. Barefoot College has increased community awareness of sustainable practices while supporting traditional knowledge. They give workshops on how to dispose of plastic responsibly, use solar cookers, improve management of water resources, including rainwater harvesting and other good practices that are kind to the environment and enhance the quality of rural life.

Furthermore, women could be “promoters of welfare” as they work and serve for the good of the rich and the poor. The command to “subdue the earth” focuses on the earth, particularly working for its cultivation and service. Now a days “subduing” also means “promoting,” which involves development in the created order. This process offers to the human being the task of intra-creational development, of bringing the world along to its fullest possible creational potential. Humans live in a highly dynamic situation. The future remains open to a number of possibilities in which creaturely activity will prove crucial for the development of the world.

These women not only act as “*Ate ng Kalikasan*” (Sister of the Environment) but also like the women in the Bible as mentioned above are “humble leaders,” instructing, governing, directing, and serving others, especially women, to become responsible stewards of the Earth. This aligns with the divine command to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the Earth, reflecting a sharing of divine creative capacities. They actively contribute to preserving natural resources and promoting environmental awareness, embodying a sense of responsibility and leadership in the service of the Earth (De La Cruz 2018).

## **7. Rearticulation of “*Ate*’s” Role as an “Overseer” of the Environment**

Women globally encounter a spectrum of challenges, as illuminated by a survey reflecting millennial perspectives (Loudenback and Jackson 2018). These issues encompass a range of societal facets, each representing a distinct concern. The survey done by Loudenback and

Jackson (2018) indicates that 12.1 percent of respondents identify lack of economic opportunities and unemployment as a pressing problem for women. This issue underscores disparities in employment and economic prospects that women face in various regions.

Moreover, Loudenback and Jackson (2018) explain that safety, security, and overall well-being emerge as a substantial concern for 14.1 percent of respondents. This category encompasses the multifaceted challenges related to personal safety, health, and the overall quality of life for women worldwide. The lack of educational opportunities is identified by 15.9 percent of respondents as a significant challenge for women. This underscores the persistent barriers that limit women's access to education, hindering their intellectual and professional advancement. Food and water security stand out as a critical issue, with 18.2 percent of respondents highlighting concerns related to the availability and accessibility of these necessities for women. Government accountability, transparency, and corruption are noted as problematic by 22.7 percent of respondents. This indicates the broader societal challenges where governance issues disproportionately affect women. Religious conflicts emerge as a concern for 23.9 percent of respondents, signifying the impact of geopolitical and social dynamics on women's lives. Poverty is identified as a substantial issue by 29.2 percent of respondents. This highlights the stark economic disparities that affect women, particularly those in disadvantaged communities. Income inequality and discrimination feature prominently, with 30.8 percent of respondents recognizing this as a significant problem. This underscores the pervasive challenges related to gender-based discrimination and economic inequities. Large-scale conflicts or wars are identified by 38.9 percent of respondents, reflecting the profound impact of geopolitical turmoil on the well-being and safety of women. Climate change and the destruction of nature emerge as the most prevalent concern, with 48.8 percent of respondents recognizing the urgent need to address environmental issues that disproportionately affect women. Loudenback and Jackson's (2018) survey illuminates the diverse and interconnected challenges that women face globally, underscoring the importance of addressing these issues comprehensively to enhance the well-being and empowerment of women across different societies (Loudenback and Jackson 2018).

Similarly, to the United Nations (UN), it is acknowledged that “Women and Environment” stands out as a pivotal focus area outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a landmark outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 (Moghadam 1996). The declaration specifically delineated three strategic objectives concerning women and the environment for governments and environmental initiatives. Firstly, it emphasized the active engagement of women in decision-making processes related to the environment across all levels. Secondly, it underscored the importance of integrating women’s perspectives and concerns into policies and programs related to environmental issues. Lastly, the platform highlighted the necessity of establishing mechanisms to evaluate the impact of both development and environmental policies on women (UN Summary Report 2015).

In essence, the Beijing Declaration recognized the imperative of ensuring women’s participation, incorporating their perspectives, and assessing the gender-specific impacts of environmental and developmental policies. This underscores a commitment to gender equality in environmental decision-making and the acknowledgment of the unique challenges women may face in the context of environmental policies and development initiatives. The strategic objectives outlined in the declaration aim to foster a more inclusive and gender-responsive approach to environmental governance, aligning with the broader goals of women’s empowerment and sustainable development.

Furthermore, women are seen as promoters of welfare in the context of overseeing the Earth. This role extends beyond mere environmental conservation; it encompasses fostering the well-being of all living beings. The duty to promote welfare implies a commitment to social and ecological justice, advocating for equitable access to resources, and ensuring that the Earth’s abundance is shared responsibly.

Despite the critical problems facing the world, women, as “*Ate*” of the environment, are envisioned as resilient and compassionate stewards. The challenges, whether environmental degradation, climate change, or social injustices, do not deter them from fulfilling

their divine charge. Instead, they rise as caretakers, using their nurturing qualities to heal and restore the environment. As humble leaders, they navigate complex issues with wisdom and empathy, promoting collaborative solutions.

This perspective emphasizes a harmonious and reciprocal relationship between humanity and the environment. Rather than interpreting dominion as domination, the role of women as overseers suggests a cooperative partnership, where humanity exercises responsible stewardship over God's creation. In this light, the concept of women as "*Ate*" of the environment reframes the narrative of Genesis, inviting a profound reflection on the interconnected roles of humanity and the divine call to care for the environment.

In the Filipino family, women are primary caregivers to children including the elderly and the sick, meaning the whole family and community rely on them. And so, they are more responsible for management and conservation of resources for their families. Thus, when natural disasters affect natural resources, their lives and their families can be intensely affected also. Women and girls are disproportionately affected according to UN, because of the distance travelled just to get water and lack of safe and private toilets makes women and girls more vulnerable to violence. For this can also be an impediment to girl's education and takes time away from income-generating activities (UN Summary Report 2015). The statement emphasizes the underrepresentation of women's perspectives in discussions surrounding critical environmental and public health issues. According to Noonan (2017), women's voices are not adequately considered or acknowledged in these domains. The author contends that the unique viewpoints and insights that women bring to environmental and public health conversations are often overlooked or undervalued.

To address this disparity, the United Nations (UN) is actively working to elevate the role of women in sustainable development and initiatives aimed at mitigating the impacts of climate change. The rationale behind this effort lies in recognizing that women's contributions are frequently taken for granted or not fully appreciated (Noonan 2017). By placing women at the forefront of these endeavors,

the UN aims to rectify the historical neglect of their perspectives and leverage the diverse and valuable insights that women can offer in shaping policies and strategies related to environmental sustainability and climate change.

In essence, the acknowledgment of the need to prioritize women in these contexts stems from a commitment to inclusivity and recognizing the often-overlooked contributions that women make in addressing complex challenges. Involving women in decision-making aims to generate better solutions for environmental and public health challenges. The call to place women at the forefront underscores the importance of diversity in perspectives and experiences in formulating strategies for a more sustainable and resilient future.

Women possess the capacity to express their opinions, take meaningful actions, and contribute to environmentally conscious decisions, both at the household level and on a global scale. The biblical narrative in Genesis emphasizes that women were placed in the garden by God, with the responsibility to work the land and care for it. This divine command to “subdue the earth” is outlined in Genesis 2:15: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Murphy 1994). Importantly, this role extends beyond mere maintenance or preservation; it involves active participation in the creative process itself.

Drawing parallels to the role of a shepherd, women are positioned to “oversee” God’s creation by adopting the role of “caretakers.” Similar to a shepherd who protects, guides, watches over, and assumes authority or dominion over a flock, women are called to fulfill a similar role in relation to the environment. The term “stewardship,” when viewed through this perspective, suggests an understanding rooted in care, nurture, and responsible stewardship rather than exploitation.

The concept of having “stewardship” over the environment implies a responsibility aligned with caregiving and nurturing, reflecting the image of God in human beings. This understanding encourages individuals to relate to the nonhuman elements of creation in a manner consistent with how God relates to them. In essence, it

introduces the idea of idealized notions of royal responsibility, wherein individuals become stewards and caretakers, assuming roles that echo the care God extends to all elements of creation, including animals.

This perspective underscores the notion that women, in their role as caretakers and overseers, play a crucial part in embodying responsible and ethical interactions with the environment. It challenges exploitative approaches, emphasizing a more harmonious and nurturing relationship with the Earth, rooted in a deep sense of responsibility and care. The biblical narrative serves as a foundational framework that encourages a holistic understanding of humanity's role in the ongoing creative process and the imperative to exercise dominion with a sense of reverence and ethical consideration.

## **8. Conclusion**

Examining the Filipino notion of "*Ate*" in the context of environmental care and sustainability not only encourages a commitment to preserving the environment but also acknowledges the capability of Filipino women to actively contribute to sustainable environmental practices. It recognizes that embracing the responsibilities associated with the role of "*Ate*" extends beyond familial contexts to encompass a meaningful role in broader environmental stewardship.

This perspective emphasizes that Filipino women, embodying the nurturing qualities associated with "*Ate*," possess the capacity to make significant and positive contributions to the ongoing efforts for sustainable environmental care. It challenges stereotypes and underscores the importance of recognizing and leveraging the potential of women in promoting a more sustainable and ecologically conscious future.

In the same vein as the resilient women depicted in the Bible, Filipina women exhibit the capacity to take a lead in environmental conservation. Their nurturing and caring qualities, akin to the role of an "*Ate*," equip them to be responsible stewards of God's creation.

This highlights that Filipina women, drawing from their inherent characteristics, are well-suited to play a crucial role in overseeing and safeguarding the environment. The reference to being an “*Ate*” underscores the significance of their tender and compassionate approach, emphasizing the need for such qualities in the responsible and ethical management of the Earth’s resources. It reinforces the idea that, like their Biblical counterparts, Filipino women can make valuable contributions to environmental preservation through their caring and attentive stewardship.

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