

KABARO



Narratives from the women's movement

Tokhang's impact on cash transfer beneficiaries | Gender equality at populist times
 What's next for the women's legislative agenda | The continuing fight for reproductive rights
 A tribute to Karina Constantino David | Life and legacy of a Moro woman
 and more...



Narratives from the women's movement

KABARO JOURNEYS

Issue 1 – March 2020

THE LONG, WINDING AND BUMPY ROAD: Beijing on my mind	8
Manifestations of populism and its impact on gender equality	17
BEYOND THE WOMEN'S VOTE: The role of women during elections	24
IN MEMORIAM: Karina Constantino David	33
ATIN 'TO: The West Philippine Sea Story	41
BAWAL BASTOS: Reclaiming safe spaces for women	48
DADAH LEAVES THE HOUSE but comes home	54
A YOUNG MOTHER, an old Tatay's promise	62
TELLING THE STORY OF THE war on the poor	68
KABAROS MOVING forward together	72

publisher's note



TERESITA QUINTOS DELES
Chairperson, INCITEGov

*S*ometimes, there are cases, when the old ways are the best.

Today, women all over the Philippines face new threats. It's true that these threats are driven by the same old forces of patriarchy, misogyny, and authoritarianism—but it's also true that these forces have never reared their heads with as much impunity, as much brazenness, and to as much public applause as they now do in our country.

It is with these threats in mind that the International Center for Innovation, Transformation, and Excellence in Governance (INCITEGov) conceived *Kwentong Kabaro*. It envisioned a continuing series of monthly conversations focused on women's issues and the stories of women's milestone moments. *Kwentong Kabaro* gathers and offers behind-the-scenes views of these milestones not because it seeks to relive old victories in the face of new threats, but because it hopes to serve as a reminder of what gains women have made, how difficult the fight for these gains has been, and how the fight must now continue in order to defend these hard-earned gains. This publication tells the story of *Kwentong Kabaro*'s first ten conversations, held from March to December 2019, which covered an array of issues as wide-ranging as they are timely and relevant for Filipino women: the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; gender and populism; the women's vote; the feminism of our late—and sorely missed—*kabaro* Karina David; the West Philippine Sea; the women's legislative agenda; life and leadership in the Bangsamoro; the continuing fight for women's reproductive rights; and the effects of the government's *Oplan Tokhang* on women. All these culminated in a conversation in December, which provided an opportunity to look back on the past at the conversations of the previous months, as well as to look ahead to the future and the next steps the community must take.

Kwentong Kabaro draws from a uniquely feminist way of conversing that is both intensely personal and unabashedly political. It emphasizes the importance of *kwentuhan*—the power of telling and hearing stories. It brings together women who see themselves as *kabaro*, as advocates cut from the same cloth of resistance and unwavering insistence on the dignity and rights of women, so they can tell how they fought the darkness of their own times, and hopefully, point the way forward as we seek to fight this new darkness we are in.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Paulynn Sicam
Lala Ordenes
EDITORS

Patricia Licuanan
Abigail de la Fuente-Valte
Jurgette Honculada
Joshua Carlo Pile
Joie Cortina
Verlie Q. Retulin
Pauline Fernandez
CONTRIBUTORS

Verlie Q. Retulin
LAYOUT EDITOR

All illustrations used in this
publication courtesy of



It offers timeless lessons for the changing times confronting the women's movement, and uncovers the foundations of age-old resistance to help inform the new and innovative ways of fighting back that are now being discovered by both the young feminists entering an established movement, and by seasoned veterans facing a world markedly different from the one they fought in.

Because *Kwentong Kabaro* is more than a retrospective. It is more than a compilation of the Philippine women's movement's greatest hits. Its methodology is, in more ways than one, a return to the fundamentals of feminism, to the basics of sisterhood—of shaping identity, forging connections, and seeing where the world is and where else it could be in the simple yet supremely empowering act of telling and listening to stories.

After all, sharing stories that illuminate the different angles of gender, stories that help women understand the various constructs that they deal with in their daily lives, have played such a large part in the birth and growth of the women's movement in the Philippines. And in the new darkness of our times, perhaps it is these old ways that would serve us best again as we look for new ways of resistance. As new threats loom, perhaps the tried-and-tested ways of the movement—more ethos than method, more spirit than system—are precisely what we need to make sense of our milieu and change it for the betterment of women. Because in the telling and the listening, we might yet ignite the fight again. In the telling and the listening, we might yet find the light once more.

Published by the
International Center for Innovation,
Transformation, and Excellence
in Governance (INCITEGov)
Level 3 CyberPark Tower 1,
60 General Aguinaldo,
Cubao, Quezon City 1109

Send us your feedback:
info@incitegov.org

Visit our website:
incitegov.org

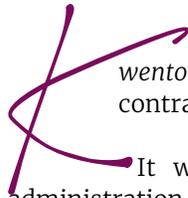
Follow us on social media:
facebook.com/INCITEGov
twitter.com/incitegov



introduction



**MARIA CLEOFE GETTIE
SANDOVAL**
Vice Chairperson,
INCITEGov



Kwentong Kabaro was conceived as an attempt to untangle a contradiction.

It was early 2019, nearly three years into the Duterte administration. Nearly three years of unbridled and unapologetic misogyny in the highest levels of government. Nearly three years of steadily creeping authoritarianism. Nearly three years of near-daily insults, abuse, and derogatory remarks towards women—often by the man occupying the highest position in the land. The year ended with the Philippines losing its spot in the top 10 of the Gender Equality Index. The country dropped eight notches, from rank 8th in 2018 to 16 in 2019.

The Philippines, it seems, was suffering from an upsurge of patriarchy and misogyny.

This, despite the many milestone laws and landmark achievements that have been won and made by an active women's movement with a storied past and a strong tradition of advocacy in multiple spheres, whether in academia, in civil society, or in government.

It is this seeming contradiction that the International Center for Innovation, Transformation, and Excellence in Governance (INCITEGov) sought to understand—and hopefully resolve—when it formulated *Kwentong Kabaro*. It sought to bring women together to hold conversations on women's issues and milestone moments in the women's movement. *Kwentong Kabaro* privileges the point of view of women working behind the scenes of milestones, or down on the ground where women's issues are matters of flesh and blood, and often of life and death—thus offering a fresh take on matters important to women everywhere. While the conversations rely on one *kabaro* to begin the discussion, its method deliberately strays from the advocacy staple of lectures and panel discussions. Instead, it is an invitation to active dialogue, a call to collaborative remembrance, and an incitement to collective action. A *kabaro*'s discussion, whatever the subject may be, only serves to spark the conversation. From there, it takes on a life of its own.

Kabaro Journeys features the first ten installments of *Kwentong Kabaro* from March to December 2019. The stories included in this volume reveal not just the wide breadth of any given conversation in the series, but also the intensely personal character each of them takes on.

In *The Long, Winding, Bumpy Road: Beijing on My Mind*—the inaugural *kwentuhan*—*kabaro* Patricia Licuanan tackles the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and calls for its fast-tracked implementation, a focus on new and emerging issues left out in the past, and a revival of feminist fervor as the landmark declaration marks its 25th year. Given her instrumental role in the drafting and eventual adoption of the Platform, Licuanan offers a rare glimpse into the negotiations that formed consensus on what is now the global benchmark for women's rights.



Meanwhile, in *Manifestations of Populism and Its Impact on Gender Equality*, kabaro Teresita Quintos Deles offers insights into how populism in the current administration is affecting women in the Philippines, and highlights the importance of resistance, along with several useful recommendations for doing so. Presenting the results of her research into the topic, Deles uncovers, in particular, the puzzling response of a supposedly robust civil society to populism and misogyny, and how it might more effectively resist these, moving forward.

In *Mga Kabaro, Nasaan ka ‘nung Eleksyon? Paano na tayo ngayon?*, kabaro Socorro Reyes discusses the role of women in the 2019 midterm elections and tackles concrete action steps that can be undertaken based on the turnout. In this conversation, Reyes perfectly melds her work as policy analyst, governance adviser, and legislative specialist with her advocacy for women, examining the notion of a “women’s vote” and providing a glimpse of what an ideal electoral system would be in a redesign geared for women’s participation and representation in government.

Babae: Feminism through the eyes of Karina Constantino-David is a memorial to the late and sorely missed kabaro, Karina David. Karina returns for a final encore of sorts with a video interview. Her daughter Kara then leads the conversation, with a handful of speakers sharing their own accounts and stories. The conversation centers on the story of Karina’s feminism, but more apparent in the dialogue is her profound impact on many of her feminist sisters in the movement.

In *Atin To: the West Philippine Sea Story*, kabaro Abigail Valte shares inside stories from when the Philippine government faced the arbitral tribunal in The Hague and made its case for Filipinos’ rights in the West Philippines. Valte was one of the two senior female government officials who formed part of the delegation which eventually won the historic ruling in 2016—the other being then-Justice Secretary and one of our most courageous kabaro Leila de Lima.

In *Bawal na ang Bastos: How the Safe Spaces and Other Milestone Laws Were Passed and What Lies Ahead*, staunch kabaro and leading legislative gender reformer Senator Risa Hontiveros presented the successes of the milestone laws forged by the churn of the women’s movement and designed for women’s protection and empowerment, outlining five other similar bills currently on the mill—including bills on SOGIE equality, absolute divorce, the welfare of solo parents, and teenage pregnancies.

Meanwhile, kabaro and Isabela Mayor Sitti Djalia Turabin-Hataman shared her experiences in pushing for progress and reform in the multiple—and often overlapping, as in her case—arenas of empowerment, whether in formal politics as a lawmaker or local executive or in civil society as an NGO leader. In a highly moving conversation for *Kabaro sa Kapayapaan: Life and Leadership in the Bangsamoro*, Hataman tells her story as a Moro woman leader and shares her hopes, struggles, and dreams—and, in doing so, outlines what might just turn out to be a better, more genuine way of doing politics, leadership, and advocacy.



In *The RH Law and the Continuing Fight for Women's Reproductive Rights*, *kabaros* Dr. Marilen Dañguilan and Dr. Junice Melgar discussed the issues hampering the effective implementation of the RH Law even seven years in. In examining the landmark law and the pitfalls it is currently navigating, Dañguilan and Melgar peel back the multiple layers that make up a milestone, and point the way ahead for advancing reproductive health for all.

Kabaros Maria Karla Abigail Pangilinan, Maria Carmen Fernandez, and Mixkaela Villalon, on the other hand, lead the conversation for *Mahirap Maging Mahirap: Ang Epekto ng Tokhang sa 4Ps*. In discussing the impact of the Duterte administration's war on drugs, this group of young researchers and artists sheds light on the experience of the poor, and explores new ways of telling stories that go beyond death tolls and dry scribbles.

Finally, in its culminating conversation for 2019, *Kwentong Kabaro* offered a conversation on its conversations and a discourse on its discourses for the past ten months: after months of providing safe spaces and incubating discussions and action, the tenth *kwentuhan* highlighted the need for further conversations, for deeper discourses, and for stronger, fiercer feminist fervor in the years to come.

Ten conversations in *Kwentong Kabaro* has made considerable headway in achieving its aims. Its conversations are attended by a wide range of women who are as varied as the subjects that are it tackled—bringing together women from different classes, fields, advocacies, and even generations, all united in sisterhood, resistance, and advocacy.

And yet *Kwentong Kabaro's* conversations, by themselves, are not the key to untangling the contradictions of our times and successfully resisting against misogyny and authoritarianism, and it does not claim this for itself. But—crucially—it is where those conversations on resistance begin.

Because what these conversations offer is a return to what formed the movement in the first place: sisterhood forged in the political and nurtured in the personal, the true condition of women clarified, and a better world envisioned in telling and in hearing stories. And in going back to its roots, the hope is for the movement to find a firmer footing in this milieu of contradictions and to forge ahead, in keeping with its grand and storied tradition of resisting and insisting on the rights and dignity of women.

And so as we publish this volume, it is our hope that *Kwentong Kabaro* would be able to tell more *kwentos* and bring more *kabaros* together—for what lies waiting in its conversations might not just be the spark of resistance. Because in the conversations it provokes, waiting for discovery, might just be the seed of the future of the Philippine women's movement.

Kwentong Kabaro





10 Years Democratic Politics Good Governance Development Outcomes

Center for Innovation, Transformation and Governance (INCITEGov) is a non-profit organization that was founded in 2005 and registered in January 2006 with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

It began as a venue for democratic leadership and society positions who, upon transitioning over from public service to private life and vice versa, remained committed to enlightening democracy in the Philippines.

INCITEGov serves as an institutional nucleus for the democratic movement in the Philippines. INCITEGov aims to develop and implement a policy agenda that links democratic governance, and development in critical reform areas.

“The Conf Women Actio Dev Peac

THE LONG, WINDING AND BUMPY ROAD:

Beijing on mind



my

BY PATRICIA LICUANAN

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 is a global landmark document for the advancement of women’s rights and empowerment. It was adopted by the UN and 189 governments at the Fourth World Conference on Women, which saw the international community coming together to tackle 12 critical areas of concern: Women and Poverty, Education and Training of Women, Women and Health, Violence Against Women, Women and Armed Conflict, Women and the Economy, Women in Power and Decision-making, Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, Human Rights of Women, Women and the Media, Women and the Environment, and The Girl-child. Its adoption also called for the integration of plans and policies at the national, regional, and global levels.

Patricia “Tatti” B. Licuanan spent two years as Chair of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) and the Preparatory Commission for the Conference. At the Conference itself, Licuanan chaired the Main Committee where the Platform for Action was negotiated.

Women's issues are a cradle of change, and change is very threatening to the status quo. This is exactly what the Fourth World Conference promised to bring, and exactly what it delivered.

Even before delegates from all over the world streamed into Beijing, the Conference had arguably achieved one of its objectives already: that is, to raise the level of awareness and discussions on gender issues on a global level. No other conference received the same media attention it did; and even down in the national and regional levels, it breathed power into advocacy for women by giving it a new legitimacy.

What enabled this change is also perhaps the most special feature of the Conference: its participatory spirit. The Conference took its emotional toll on us, because past conferences had focused largely on geopolitical issues, and there we were, finally discussing women's issues, issues that affected everybody on a personal level, issues that affected women, men, and families everywhere. And as women, we insisted on being heard.

Women broke the silence on their issues

What for me is the most important outcome of the Conference is that it broke new ground and talked about issues that by then had never been fully discussed.

For instance, the Conference elevated violence against women to the level of public policy, and not just a domestic concern. Through the Conference, we were also able to broaden the definition of VAW (Violence Against Women) to include acts that were previously justified in the name of culture and



Poster from the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (1995)/ Photo from Patricia Licuanan.

tradition.

Another important issue we tackled was the acknowledgement of women's unremunerated work. We always hear of "working women", but if we really think about it, there is no such thing as a woman who doesn't work. All women are working women. And yet all the hard work a woman does at home is never given any monetary value. In response to this, we called for the development of methodologies to actually measure these kinds of work and reflect it in national accounts.

The Conference, for the first time, recognized women migrant workers as a vulnerable group and ensured their rights—a very relevant issue for "sending" countries like ours.

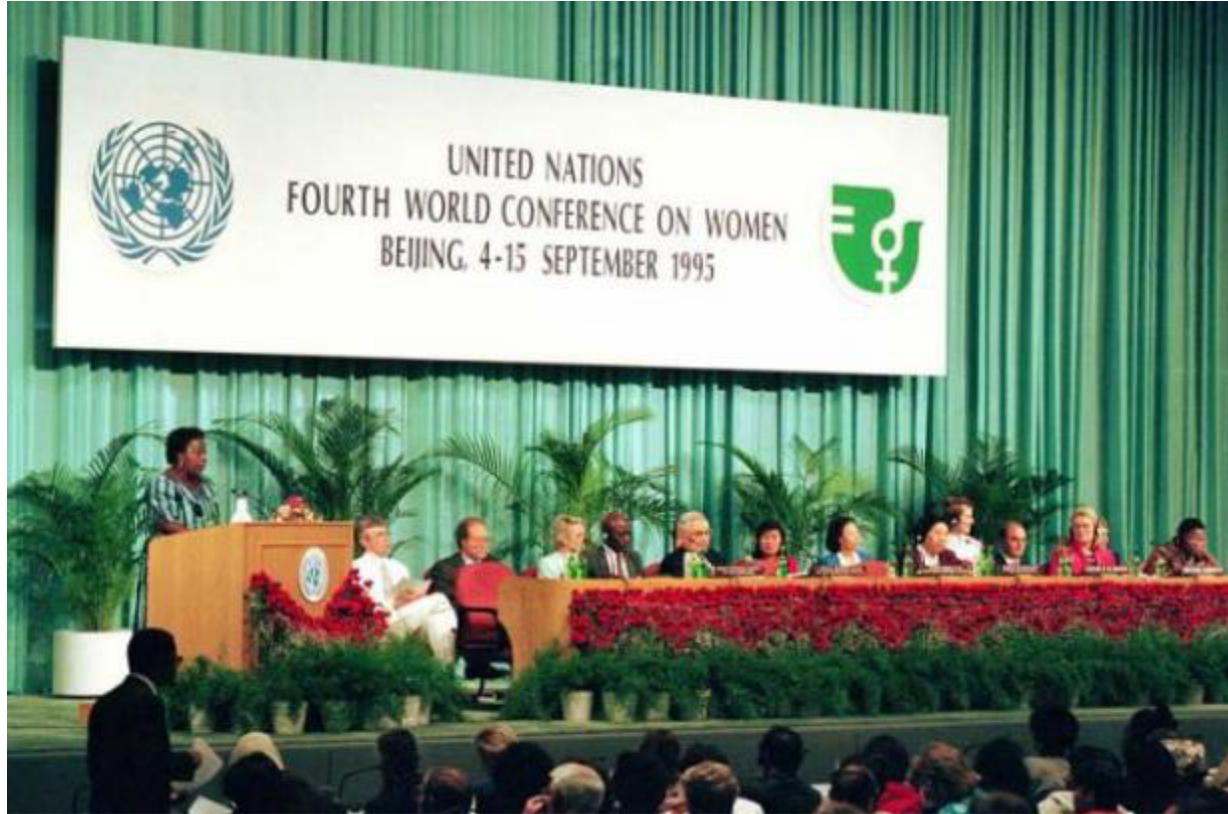
Heated debates and balancing acts

One of the highlights of the Conference was the debate on the universality of rights versus the consideration of cultural and religious particularities. This was a tightrope—you can't simply dismiss culture and tradition, but we were also aware that these can be used to justify violence against women. True enough, we had to negotiate a carefully crafted consensus that called for a balancing act; and though difficult, we emphasized that the universality of rights must be placed above everything else, while considering culture and tradition at the same time.

Meanwhile, the chapter on health probably had the most heated debates. Reproductive health, family planning, and abortion were all contentious issues. In particular, the subject of abortion was met

by religious fundamentalists on one side and feminists from more democratic states on the other. Both parties were tentative to make amendments for fear of a backslide, as that then-current agreement sufficiently satisfied their respective causes. It was decided to retain the previous agreement that "in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning", and "in circumstances where abortion is not against the law, such abortion should be safe." Action was also recommended to "consider reviewing laws containing punitive action against women who have undergone illegal abortion", as they are victims as well and should not be punished.

Some of the more contentious topics were on sexual rights, gender, and sexual orientation. The term "sexual rights" encountered such strong objection that it looked like we would never come to an agreement. Still, we



Opening day session of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing: UN Photo/Milton Grant

were able to reach a compromise, and agreed on this provision: “the human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health.”

The term “gender” also caused disputes with a few countries insisting that the word be left out of the document altogether—which would have been chaotic. Some groups feared that we were giving “gender” a new meaning, and that by doing so we were opening the way to same-sex marriages, among other things. But in the end, “gender” stayed: we cited how it had been commonly used and understood in its ordinary and generally accepted usage, which can be found in many

other UN forums and conferences, and we emphasized that there was no indication that the Platform intended to use the word in any different way.

I can say that sexual orientation was possibly the most emotional of the debates in the conference. Sexual orientation was listed among the many factors that acted as barriers to full equality, and yet no one wanted to tackle it. There was some tension between those arguing against discrimination and those saying it was against their culture and tradition. I made the difficult decision to delete the topic of sexual orientation throughout the document. Regardless, this was still significant since it marked the first time that sexual orientation was discussed in the UN.

BEIJING BECAME A PLATFORM FOR ADVOCACY AND ACTION

The conference took on a consultative process in which all parties had to agree to each concern. National committees and reports were created within each country, and there were regional platforms for action as well.

As for the negotiating process, the main objective was, always, to arrive at a consensus. This is very important because, without consensus, we wouldn’t have a document.



And while whatever document would be produced by the Conference would not be legally binding, it could still be very powerful—it could be used as an advocacy tool, supported by strong advocates around the world. We understood, even then, that whatever would be in the Platform, or in any UN document for that matter, could carry a lot of weight.



BEIJING LESSONS ON MY MIND

I remember being a keynote speaker at the UN Commission on the Status of Women last March 2015, and I talked about the lessons I learned when we celebrated Beijing +20 back then. These lessons remain relevant today—and they are still on my mind—as we look forward to Beijing +25.

First: the concerns and problems of women have changed drastically more than two decades since the Platform of Action.

Second: some problems also continue to persist. Contentious issues in Beijing, like reproductive health and rights, are still contentious today. Possibly the most emotional of the debates at Beijing was that on “sexual orientation” and, true enough, sexual orientation and gender identity remain highly controversial today, with little possibility of achieving consensus.

Third: most countries have removed discriminatory laws and adopted laws to promote gender equality, but changing the law is easier than changing attitudes and behavior as de facto equality lags far behind.

Fourth: efforts must be accompanied by strong gender equality and women’s empowerment entities. National machineries on women have to be strengthened, with gender and development as focal points in organizations and agencies.

Fifth: good gender-disaggregated data is a very powerful tool, and there is a need to strengthen data institutions and build up the data capacity of national machineries.

And, finally, allies in all sectors will be of great help in championing women’s causes.



KWENTUHANG KABARO

Other women present in Beijing share their own stories

- The 1975 women’s conference in Mexico is the first conference held by the UN to focus solely on women’s issues and which marked a turning point in policy directives. However, the issues that were tackled then were mostly concerned on middle-class Western women, and there was a need to establish that women in developing countries face different issues. The Philippine delegation always remained dynamic: they knew how to deal with their western counterparts and, because they were articulate in English, they could successfully raise the issues being faced by Asian women.

- In the activities leading to the 2nd UN women’s conference held in 1985 in Nairobi, Asian women were always under-represented. Asia being the most culturally and ethnically diverse region in the world, the presence of Asian women came through as very dispersed and weak, as compared to the Latin American and the African women. Noting this, the Philippine NGO women led by PILIPINA decided to work with other Asian women leaders to produce and bring an “alternative Asian report” to parallel the NGO forum in Nairobi. For this purpose, they formed the Asian Women’s Research and Action Network (AWRAN), which consolidated alternative country reports from 14 Asian countries. For the Philippines, the alternative report was done by the Philippine Women’s Research Collective (PWRC), covering around seven sectors.

The unique role of the Philippine delegation

- When faced with contentious issues, delegates from other countries would often say that they have to check first with their capital, but not so for the Philippines, whose delegates would simply talk among themselves.





Photos of guest speaker Patricia "Tatti" Licuanan and the session's attendees during the open forum.

• The Philippine delegation had a very special role at the official Beijing conference. It held very strong positions. It understood the issues of developing countries that are very strong in family and tradition but, at the same time, holding very modern and progressive views. Thus, the delegation was able to bridge the two sides. Licuanan shared, however, that neither camp fully trusted her as the Chair: "As a Catholic Filipino, the EU often watched when someone from the religious groups talked to me, thinking, 'Oh, they're influencing her.' On the other hand, the religious fundamentalists thought, 'We can't trust her,' as the Philippine delegation was composed of feminists. The Philippine Embassy was worried about what stand I would take as a feminist and fail to protect more traditional values. This was the type of atmosphere there was."

Moving forward and reviving the feminist fervor

• **Should there be a Fifth Conference on Women?** Licuanan explained that while the idea sounds nice enough, and 25 years since Beijing has been a long time, given the current environment, and looking at how governments which had championed women's rights in Beijing have since turned right-wing and authoritarian, there seems to be no way that these countries would now support a document more progressive than the Platform. It may

even be difficult to retain the Platform as is. It is certainly going to be diluted and weakened, which makes a fifth Conference dangerous.

• **With allies seemingly disappearing and with feminist fervor flagging across generations, what can we do?** Licuanan shared that an Asia-Pacific NGO caucus has been organized to discuss what can be

in providing an opportunity to reflect."

• It may not be beneficial to reopen Beijing in a Fifth Conference, since many issues that were contentious at the time, like reproductive rights, abortion, and LGBT issues, are even more contentious today. Still, conversations and reflections must continue. Even among Filipino feminists and women's organizations in the country, it is important to restart and revive conversations. It is important to continue dialogues and to have a united voice—which does not mean an agreement on all counts, but a consensus that allows women to move forward together.



WOMEN MUST CONTINUE WHAT THEY DO AND REMAIN MOTIVATED.

The UN is not the only forum, and women must create their own.

done for Beijing +25. She emphasized, however, that it's not always necessary to work through the government: "In the modern world, even small things can spread easily—and that's what women should do. Women must continue doing what they do and remain motivated. The UN is not the only forum, and women must create their own. Activities like *Kwentong Kabaro* are particularly useful

The story continues

• To close the day's *kwentuhan*, (discussion), Teresita Quintos Deles said it is good to be reminded of the document and the role of the Philippines in the *kwento* (story) of its adoption. The tragedy, however, is that women's rights are now being degraded every day under the current political leadership. As Beijing's *kwento* continues, and as we see what is now happening in the country, it is important for women to come out with an alternative voice in Beijing +25 to show how things have really been for women. Licuanan also emphasized the important role of young women here—even those who were not yet born when the Beijing Platform was forged.



“

“In the present day, to say that it is a trying time for women would be an understatement. It is truly a mark of failure once those with power and influence are allowed to use their machinery to degrade and disparage mothers, sisters, and daughters.

“This is further encouraged by those watching our leaders from their screens, simply laughing off each lewd comment and typing away at those who express dissent to not get their panties in a bunch. The normalization of a culture of abuse toward women should ignite outrage. The attack against women must have women themselves at the forefront of the battle. No matter how many laws are passed, if the ordinary woman on the street cannot feel safe, then what would everything have been for?

“The road to Beijing and towards consensus was long, winding and very bumpy. But more significantly, the road from Beijing to where we are today, and the way forward is equally if not even more so, because of the climate around us.

“The path forward is sure to be anything but easy.”

– Teresita Quintos Deles

“

“One of our major commitments is really these intergenerational feminisms— basically, the people of our generation and the younger ones. We would really want to bring in many of those who were still spirits floating around during Beijing. They have a very special role now.

“It was very clear that everybody related to Beijing, either from direct experience or from what they heard about it, even in a different way. It was all constructive, it was all contributing to our common commitments. Let’s bring in the younger ones.”

– Patricia Licuanan

BY JOSHUA CARLO PILE

There has been an undeniable trend of rising populism in the recent decade, with the ascendance of elected populist leaders throughout the world. In 2016, Donald Trump, known for his populist political positions, won a surprise victory against Hillary Clinton in the United States. That same year, on the other side of the globe, Rodrigo Duterte grabbed an unprecedented win in the Philippines. Both leaders have seemingly enticed the masses with their unconventional backgrounds. In Duterte's case, he was the first chief executive of the country from Mindanao, and he became controversial for his expletive-laden speeches.

These leaders have also caught domestic and international attention with their misogynistic pronouncements—tactical moves to suppress those who oppose them, especially women. In particular, Duterte has taken this approach to many of his known critics such as Senator Leila de Lima, Vice President Leni Robredo, and journalist Maria Ressa. In spite of this, the president continues to have popular support. It raises the question: how do these manifestations show the inextricable ties between populism, and women and gender equality?

The second installment of *Kwentong Kabaro* aimed to show the impact of Duterte's populism on women and gender equality in the Philippines. The forum provided a space for discussion, particularly on how Duterte's policies impact, and how the public, especially civil society, is responding. The forum concluded with several recommendations to help counter this rising phenomenon.





MANIFESTATIONS OF POPULISM AND ITS IMPACT ON *Gender Equality*

The second conversation in the *Kwentong Kabaro* series focused on an issue of greater and greater urgency today worldwide: the rise of populism. To lead the conversation, Teresita Quintos Deles shared the results of her study on the phenomenon and its impact on gender equality.

The paper, as Deles recounted, was the result of a partnership with a multilateral agency. She was happy to do the paper, especially as populism is a major problem under the current leadership in the Philippines. But the agency—which is supposed to be neutral—is in no position to publish the paper: “We cannot really touch it, it’s too political for us. *Sa inyo na lang* (You may use it instead),” Deles recounted her partners as saying. Instead, the paper would debut in a *Kwentong Kabaro* conversation.

The agency’s interest in examining populism is understandable given what is happening around the world. While Duterte is a particular cause of concern for us, according to Deles, it is also clear that this is happening elsewhere. But while populist leaders are everywhere, Duterte remains the poster boy of populism in Asia.

In her paper, Deles lays down the backdrop in which Duterte’s populism emerged. The Philippines has an outstanding record in gender equality; it ranks first in Asia, and is the only Asian country in the Top 10 of gender equality world rankings. And yet, there is blatant shaming and insulting of women in the country today.

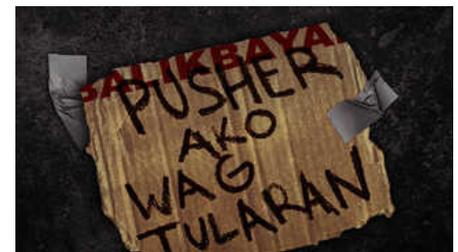
In offering a definition, Deles emphasizes that populism is not a new concept, though it was previously obscure and was rarely used to describe certain leaders. Here Deles makes several important distinctions: populism itself is simply an approach or a set of political ideas and activities intended to gain the support of ordinary people by giving them what they want. Populist are largely popular, but a populist leader differs from a popular leader. These definitions, according to Deles, indicate how the concept of populism is taking shape today.

Speaking of concepts: populism is not an ideology in the usual sense. As Deles explained, populism counts among “thin ideologies,” which have few formal principles, and lack social analysis and direction of action, the implication being that populism can and has been used by both right- and left-wing leaders. But the focus now, according to Deles, is on the practice of populism—how populist leaders gain and exercise power.

see the constant cursing, rape jokes, and unwanted touching and kissing of women—that underscore the leader’s image as an outsider. Finally, there is the massive use of media to push the populist narrative, including fake news and troll armies, which are now part of daily discourse in the Philippines.

Duterte’s populism and misogyny

Deles discussed how Duterte’s



While there is no single authoritative definition of modern populism, it has distinct features. Among these, according to Deles, is the division of society into “the pure masses” versus “the corrupt elite,” or, in the Philippine case, “Duterte Diehard Supporters” versus “the *Dilawans*”. Another is the penchant of populist leaders to portray themselves as outsiders. Another feature is the construction of a crisis which, conveniently, only the populist leader can solve. In relation to this, another feature is the need for a strongman to defend the poor masses and solve the crisis—whether it’s the supposed drug problem, or traffic in EDSA. Next is the performance of bad manners and defiance of protocols—

populism connects with his misogyny, especially since misogyny is not generally considered a common feature of populism. Here Deles points to the work of Dr. Maria Tanyag, who emphasizes that populism is actually “enabled by and underpins a gender ideology.” Masculinity ties to power and leadership, which then intensifies “hypermasculine” forms of leadership. The takeaway: misogyny is not necessarily part of populism, but closer examination shows that they are consistent and mutually reinforcing.

Deles mentions the three ways in which the two connect: misogyny and populism highlight violence and aggression against “the enemy” or “the other”; the sexual domination of women and male aggression becoming sources of political authority and support; and the projection of the populist as a “benevolent father.”

Some would claim Duterte is no misogynist because he puts women in



leadership positions—but Deles noted that there is a key distinction for him: Duterte only appoints and takes care of women he considers his, women who support him.

The impact on women and gender equality in terms of policy

In her paper, Deles also demonstrates how populism and misogyny affect women and gender equality in terms of policy by examining three cases: the war on drugs, the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN)

Law, and the Marawi siege.

In the war on drugs, for instance, while most of the victims killed were men, the impact on the women left behind—the traumatized and brutalized survivors left to pick up the pieces of their lives and provide for their families—is huge and continuing. Deles also points to a PILIPINA study that highlights how the conduct of the war on drugs violates women’s rights, and how it creates a new underclass of the urban poor who are ostracized in their communities and



left poorer and more vulnerable than they already were.

On TRAIN, Deles notes that taxation is not a populist issue, but the reform package did have the support of economists and fiscal managers, and it was sold on the popular “Build, Build, Build” line and pushed on the populist promise of bigger take-home pay for rank-and-file employees. But the rollout of the first reform package under TRAIN showed that little attention was given to social protection measures for those who would be most affected by it. Households all over the country saw runaway inflation in its wake—a

problem women had to deal with, as they often take care of the family purse.

The Marawi siege, on the other hand, simply highlighted even more what we already know: anywhere in the world, women suffer more than men from war. The beginning of the siege was already ominous for women, with Duterte telling soldiers they can rape up to three women, “on him.” Marawi, the country’s only Islamic city, had not been touched by war; what the women experienced is a new phenomenon, which threatened physical and psychological security, with unverified reports of sexual violence. With war returning to Maguindanao, people are being driven to terrorism after seeing the government’s response to Marawi, and more women are set to suffer the burden of armed conflict.

Populist performance

As important as the impact of his policies are the deep-seated effects of Duterte’s theater of “common tao (person)” misconduct. Rape and violence against women are trivialized and rationalized. Sexual harassment is normalized. The cursing of mothers is routinized. Marriage vows and equal and respectful relations are assaulted. Women’s competence for public service and leadership are publicly diminished and ridiculed. Women in senior public positions are subjected to political persecution—including Vice President Leni Robredo, Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales, Senator Risa Hontiveros, Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, CHED Chair Patricia Licuanan, and, most prominently, Senator Leila de Lima. The same is true of women in the media, like Maria Ressa of Rappler and Ellen Tordesillas of VERA Files.

Some would say that a lot of laws beneficial for women have been passed under Duterte, but the truth is, it’s not because of him; for instance, it was Senator Hontiveros who actually pushed for the Expanded Maternity Leave and the Safe Spaces Acts. And Duterte’s thinking is clear here: these laws are acceptable, as long as they do not touch him and they won’t make him personally accountable.

*Photos from Deles’ presentation

Civil society's response

According to Deles, civil society's response has been creative and bold, but, unfortunately, dispersed and inadequate. There are EveryWoman, currently the most broad-based coalition with the most organized and sustained action, including its *Bantay Bastos* Facebook page; the Women Defend Democracy project of PILIPINA; *Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Pamilyang Pantawid* (SNPP) composed of the beneficiaries of the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* (4Ps) who organized themselves to defend their families and the program, and who are getting more and more politically active.

Issue-based actions have mainly focused on extrajudicial killings, such as *Baigani's* workcamps for survivor families of EJK victims. In some barangays, there are now female *tanod* who patrol their neighborhoods nightly. There was the United Women's Action during the celebration of the 2019 International Women's Day, which was historic because all women groups were there; and the successful *Babae Ako* social media campaign after Duterte kissed a married Filipina onstage in Seoul. Unfortunately, these were not sustained.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR *resistance*

Deles outlined some possible ways forward for resisting populism and misogyny. First, go back to base organizing. Base organizing had weakened in recent years, partly because many avenues for engagement for women had become more technical under past administrations, and partly because the passage of milestone laws caused some complacency. Few organizations are still being organized as women's organizations tackling women's rights and welfare. If we are to resist, we need a base. It must be done again, but it must be done differently. Deles points to two generational bookends that are crucial here: the millennials, and the "milleniors". What is encouraging, according to Deles, is that women are now more conscious of the need for inter-generational interaction.

Second is to create a *Bantay Bastos* program. EveryWoman launched a *Bantay Bastos* page to immediately call out any public personality who does *kabastusan* (lewdness). The launch was good, the page is still running, but it hasn't quite picked up. We need more women to say no to the *bastos*, whenever they come out.

Third, Deles proposed a parallel civil society mechanism to fill the gap of public oversight over women's rights and status. The legally mandated public oversight offices are not working, and they are led by women appointed by Duterte. In the absence of institutional voices, women's groups should be more vocal. Former chairs of the national women's machinery could serve to initiate this effort.

Finally, there is a need for a women's political project—specifically, an electoral project. This includes the development of women politicians who know how to think politics: they have to know that if they are elected today, tomorrow they have to start planning for the next elections. "We have to have women politicians. It's a sector we don't have. We cannot ignore this because that is the route to political power—unless the world changes. Good women don't like to go into politics either, but we have to. We cannot just be organizing to resist," Deles said.

Kwentuhang Kabapo

On Duterte's populism

• **Are there populist women leaders, too?** Deles said current populists in power are predominantly male, but if there are women, they follow the same playbook. Meanwhile, Duterte's characteristics seem to be natural to him and were not strategized to make him a populist. This style is similar to Donald Trump, who was not aiming for the presidency when he first developed himself and his following. Today, though, populist leaders have learned to tap into their attraction to certain segments of the population and are sharpening each other's practice.

• **Is the administration capitalizing on Duterte's characteristics to build his popularity?** Duterte is not spontaneous; some of his remarks and his posturing are meant to distract from real issues. Deles said that while others may encourage Duterte, it is all still largely him. He happens to be a natural populist, and even goes beyond—which is why the international community is especially disturbed by him.

• The members of the reproductive health (RH) sector supported him during the campaign because he was the only local official who stood up to the church hierarchy. During the campaign, he appealed to the greater public by talking about drugs and being foul-mouthed, triggering something not just in men, but also in women.

• While misogyny may be natural to Duterte, it is also intentional. For instance, Duterte never curses when he's with the MILF. Deles added that Duterte as mayor was not as expletive-laden, it was the presidency that brought it all out.

Page 20, counter clockwise: *Padasal para sa mga Pinaslang: Undas ng Kababaihan* on October 24, 2017/ Photo by Jire Carreon • Teresita Quintos Deles during the launch of the *Bantay Bastos* campaign on March 8, 2018/ Photo from EveryWoman's Facebook page • Members of the *Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Pamilyang Pantawid (SNPP)* lobbying for the passage of 4Ps Act • EveryWoman conveners during the *Kamustahan ng Kababaihang Naulila: Landas ng Paghilom* on October 30, 2018/ Photo from EveryWoman's Facebook page.



Photos of guest speaker Teresita Quintos Deles and the attendees during the session's open forum

“

DUTERTE IS THE TYPE OF LEADER WHO WILL GIVE YOU SOMETHING AND TAKE SOMETHING ELSE BACK.

• During campaign events, many women looked up to Duterte because of his “accomplishments,” but this fizzled out when he made his first rape joke. He is the type of leader who will give you something and take something back. Women groups in Davao campaigned for him because he was the first to pass an RH Code, a Gender and Development (GAD) Code, and anti-violence against women and their children (VAWC) policy at the local level. However, these were not actually his. Women worked for those ordinances, Deles said, and Duterte surely violated them.

• Duterte is “being everyone to everybody.” He is a Muslim to Muslims; an RH advocate to RH advocates; a New People’s Army (NPA) to the NPA. He is fooling everyone, and his goal is power. But this kind of power only lasts for so long, and Duterte is already exposed. Deles agreed but said that he has already done a lot of damage in the meantime.

On social media and disinformation

• **Why is it that the accomplishments of the previous administration are not being recorded? And how is it that fake news can overwhelm the discourse?** Deles pointed to studies showing that many were simply caught unaware by the use of social media. The “*dilawan*” branding is prominent here, which is textbook populism.

“

HE IS BEING EVERYONE TO EVERYBODY.

• Another reason is that education is often overlooked. Many young Filipinos go through an education system that may not be updated anymore, or may no longer be oriented towards having a better society.

On women’s initiatives and participation

• What is the role of Gabriela, one of the more media-dominant groups? What are they doing? Deles recounted that the group earlier coalesced with Duterte, breaking away from him only when Judy Taguiwalo was not confirmed as



secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). They are anti-Duterte now.

- Urban poor groups are also very strong and have addressed several issues, including security of tenure, housing, basic services, and the right to participate. Some groups also conduct neighborhood watches against *Tokhang*. Most of their leaders are women, and it is important to support them so they can run at least for *barangay* positions.

Resistance in other segments of the population

- People would often say millennials are only online, which is not true; many offline conversations are happening and are led by different groups. There should be inter-generational interactions between “milleniors” and millennials. Deles added that seniors should learn to adapt to technology and emphasized the need to learn to work with each other without imposing.

- **Are there also programs that target men?** DSWD conducted seminars in communities with high VAW rates in the past. It may be harder for the men, but it is important for women’s groups to engage them on these concerns. Men-only seminars were also developed along these topics. Deles added, however, that she doesn’t really want to spend time thinking about men and how to organize them; she would prefer instead to talk to “woke” men and challenge them: “So what will you do about it?”

- Moving forward, there is a need to organize the suggested mechanism for calling out misogyny. This will have an impact on society; those who are afraid to talk will come out and will gain courage. Deles said someone should develop it, with women—and possibly men—to form the parallel civil society voice that will work to reverse the normalization of what is happening now.

“ ...INTER-GENERATIONAL INTERACTIONS, SO MILLENIORS CAN SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES TO MILLENNIALS.”

MARCH 2019

Beyond the women's vote:
**THE ROLE OF
WOMEN**
during elections

BY VERLIE Q. RETULIN

Democratic Political
and Government
Development Outcomes

tion, Transformation
(JC216Gov) is a
organization that was
ered in January 2006
and Exchange

er for democratic
stitutions who, upon
public service to
to, remained
democracy in the

ational nucleus for
government in the
develop and
into democratic
development
areas.





Kabaros sharing their "kodigo" for the May 2019 midterm elections. Photo from EveryWoman's Facebook page.

**EACH ONE OF US IS
A PLAYER IN THE
ELECTIONS.
EACH PERSON
HAS A DIFFERENT
ROLE TO PLAY,
WHETHER
AS A VOTER,
CANDIDATE, OR
CAMPAIGNER.
AND, IN ALL OF
THESE ROLES,
WE ARE PRESENT.**

When people talk about political participation, election is the first—and perhaps the biggest—word that appears in the word cloud. Some participate through voting, which has been described online as “the most quintessential form of political participation.” Others take it a notch higher and run as electoral candidates themselves.

In May 25’s *Kwentong Kabaro*, political analyst Dr. Socorro Reyes took a deeper look at how women participated in the recent elections by using a framework she called “4Ps: Players, Process, Products and Policy Outcomes”.

Women as voters

Female voters outnumber the male voters in the Philippines. Specifically, 51.45 percent, or roughly 32 million of the registered voters in the country in 2019 are female, based on Commission on Elections (COMELEC) data. On the other hand, there are only 30 million male registered voters.

Still, these figures alone are not enough to establish that there is a “women’s vote” in the country.

“The first step in building a women’s vote is to determine how women voted and why,” Reyes explained.

She previously pitched an idea to the COMELEC and suggested that voters indicate their gender in the ballots. The suggestion was declined, however, as Comelec had argued that this would constitute a breach in the privacy of the voters.

Thus, it is up to the women’s groups and organizations to conduct their own research—especially in vote-rich areas—to determine how women voted in the past. Such study, Reyes stressed, should be scientific, objective and evidence-based.

“This is essential to prove that women can make and unmake candidates. Unless this is proven, candidates will not recognize the power women have in elections,” she said.

Reyes also pointed out that the women’s sector is differentiated by socio-economic classes. “The majority of women belong to the D and E class,” she said. “Class D is the low-income group and is the bulk of the population at 60 percent, while Class E covers 30 percent of the female population,” she added.

Recognizing the intersectionality of gender and class is important for future candidates, she said. Political aspirants should direct their campaign efforts in helping women, especially those in lower income brackets, to address issues on livelihood, healthcare, children education and domestic violence, among others.

“We can talk about gender sensitivity until we drop dead but what these people are facing are ‘pocket issues’,” she said, adding that women from marginalized and poverty-stricken communities should also be involved in the campaign.

“Most of us here came from the ABC classes and there’s only a few of us at 3.7 million. Those who are here today are university-educated, urban-based, [and] middle-class. We are talking to the choir,” Reyes added.

Women as candidates

There is also a need to get more women of quality and substance into politics.

Describing it as a paradox, Reyes noted that few women vie for government positions despite the sector having more registered voters (than men) and being participative during elections.

“Fewer, still, are the women who win in the elections,” she mused.

In a policy brief, the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) pointed out that while women comprise half of the country’s population, the sector only holds one-fifth of government elected positions.

“From 1998 to 2016, the percentage of women elected into public office ranged from 16.1 percent to 21.44 percent, reaching its peak in the 2016 elections,” the paper stated. Meanwhile, in the 2019 elections,

only 20.16 percent (8,782) of the candidates were female.

The figures are below the 30 percent “critical mass” identified by scholars as “the minimum percentage necessary for a minority group to be able to influence decision-making.”

PCW attributes the slow increase in women’s representation in politics to prevailing patriarchal norms and values, and gender stereotypes. After all, it has been said that politics is more the realm of men than women.

“Gender stereotypes that consider women as weak, emotional and indecisive—qualities that are undesirable in negotiation and decision-making—discourage voters from voting for women candidates. At the same time, the “multiple burden” experienced by most women, who bear most of the responsibility for performing domestic duties while they engage in political, economic and social activities, discourages women



Clockwise: Then vice presidential candidate Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo during the 2016 presidential elections; Senator Risa Hontiveros on the Senate floor; detained senator Leila de Lima waiving at her supporters; and senatorial candidate Samira Gutoc-Tomawis during the 2016 midterm elections/ Photo from their official Facebook pages

themselves from running for public office,” the PCW paper explained.

Apart from this, the country’s current electoral system also makes it difficult for women to raise funds for their campaign, creating an additional barrier that further discourages them from running.

Specifically, the “first-past-the-post” or plurality system affects the preference of political parties or groups to finance male candidates who are perceived to have higher probabilities of winning the election, PCW explained.

“In the Philippines, the winner takes all. Whoever gets the highest number of votes will get the seat,” Reyes said in her discussion. This puts women on the losing end.

To address these concerns, she came up with two suggestions.

The first involves redesigning the current electoral system and advocating for a “closed-list proportional representation with large multi-member districts and high party threshold.”

According to Reyes, this means that the elections will be party-based. Each party will create a closed list of candidates with alternating names of men and women, the order of which is already fixed and will no longer be subject to change.

Moreover, bigger districts will be created to have bigger voting populations, and the seats that will be given to each party will depend on the number of votes that they receive.

Such a redesign, she said, will favor women. “It is difficult for women to win elections within a plurality system unless they are part of a political family. However, the base of political

recruitment should not be the family but the political party.”

She observed, “The only reason, I think, why political families became the base of political recruitment is because our political parties are weak. You don’t have a stable source of candidates, so you go to the family.”

Her second suggestion focuses on campaign finance. “Along with awareness raising, there should also be fund raising from Day 1.”

Reyes cited that in the United States, the Democrats have the EMILY’s (Early Money is Like Yeast) List while the Republican Party has its Maggie’s List. Both are political action committees that are geared towards electing women in public office by securing funds for their candidacy.



Women as campaigners

Getting women to run and win government positions is just a part of what Reyes called the “Inside/Outside strategy”.

The “outside” strategy involves intensifying citizen advocacy for policy change. “While getting candidates inside Congress is critical, taking the advocacy to the parliament of the streets should simultaneously be leveled up,” she stressed.

Political patronage is still prevalent in the Philippines and has even gone worse. It includes retail politics (vote-buying), post-poll awards (awarding of project-based contracts and concessions to big supporters), and pork barrel.

The *kabaros* present during the event—most of whom served as volunteers for opposition candidates during the campaign—bared the flagrant vote-

buying practices that they witnessed on the ground during the campaign period for the 2019 elections.

“It’s being done in your face,” Mina of Likhaan Women’s Center said. “They used to keep it a secret but now, whenever there’s a new program, you know that you will pay for it come election time.”

She said that one of her friends in the community had to sell her vote despite being exposed to voter education campaigns. “Mina, I’m sorry,” her friend told her apologetically. “I had to accept the P500 yesterday. I’m so sorry, but we really had to buy rice. I can’t say no.”

Celia of PILIPINA reported a new strategy where people from the government recruit individuals to work on a candidate’s campaign from

“

I'M SORRY. I HAD TO
ACCEPT THE 500 PESOS
YESTERDAY.

*We really had to buy rice.
I can't say no.*

March to June. Hired under a job order, the LGU pays them P10,000 as their monthly salary. Their main task is to get five family leaders who, in turn, will get another five each, and so on.

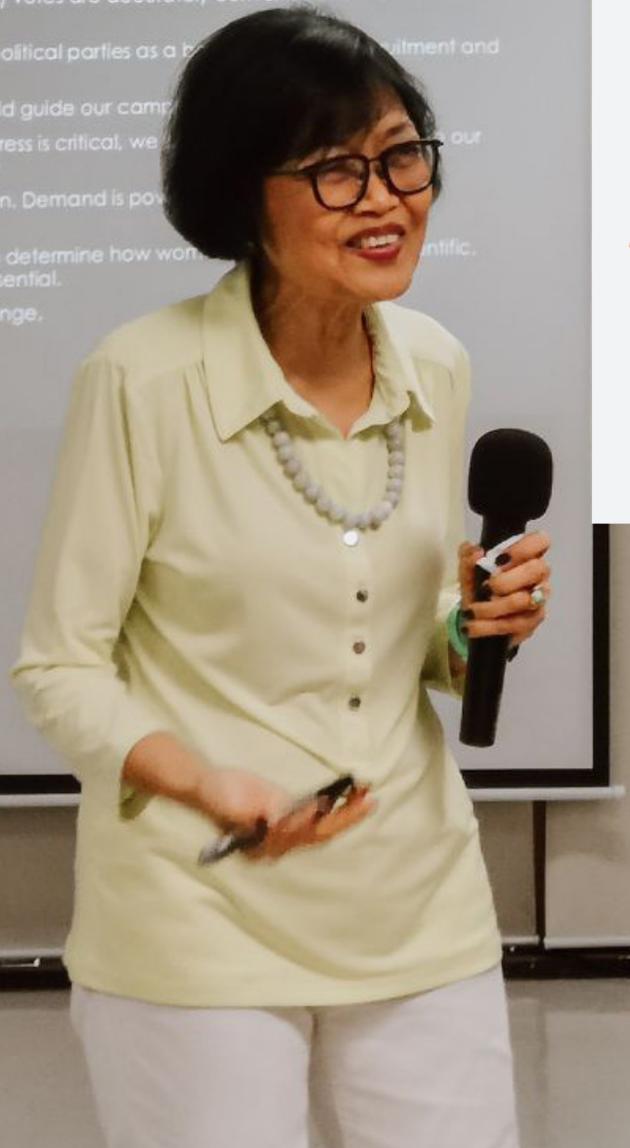
The amount paid per voter, Celia said, varies per area, and if the voter will be voting for the entire slate or only some of its candidates.

Maris of EveryWoman also pointed out how the element of fear is being used to



Photos of guest speaker Socorro Reyes and the session's participants during the open forum

mechanism is credible and acceptable only if: 1)
) votes are accurately converted into the number of
political parties as a b... commitment and
d guide our camp...
ress is critical, we... our
n. Demand is pov...
determine how wor...
ential.
nge.



Political analyst Dr. Socorro Reyes

“

MGA KABARO,
WALANG BIBITIW.
UMPIISA PA LANG,
*malayo pa ang ating
lalakbayin!*

(Kabaros, keep holding on.
This is just the beginning;
we still have a long way to go!)

incline people to vote for local politicians.

“I asked, ‘Why did you sell your vote?’ and they said, ‘Ma’am, because they’ll know who we are going to vote for.’” Maris shared that politicians maintain an acceptable threshold of loss in every *barangay* and, if the votes they garnered go lower than this, they will surely get back to the area that did not deliver.

“In some places with political dynasties, ‘getting back’ could really mean death,” she stressed. “But it can also be economic retaliation. They will make that *barangay* suffer.”

While these problems are not entirely new, their continued existence as well as their evolution over time only highlights the need to launch an electoral project early on.

At the same time, preserving and sustaining the relationship fostered with grassroots communities is also important. “We should continue our efforts to organize and mobilize communities. We should be able to utter and forward our principles and platforms,” Mira urged her *kabaros*.

“You don’t have to give anything,” community organizer Trinidad said. “Just get in touch with them, meet them regularly and sustain them all throughout.”

The 2019 mid-term election was seen as a referendum on the performance of the Duterte administration. As the results were being transmitted, the public slowly witnessed the ascension of Duterte allies to the Senate, among them: Bong Go, former presidential aide; Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa, architect of the deadly drug war; Imee Marcos, daughter of dictator Ferdinand Marcos Jr.; and Ramon “Bong” Revilla Jr., who made a successful political comeback after his plunder acquittal.

On the other hand, none of the candidates fielded by the opposition made it to the Magic 12.

Despite the heartbreaking outcome, Mayen of Kamalayan remained optimistic and told her *kabaros* not to lose hope. “We just have to make people understand who among the candidates are the right choices for their vote,” she said.



What's next for the sector?

In the latter part of the open forum, the participants were divided into four groups and were asked to identify the next steps that the women sector can take moving forward.

Group A

- Considering the low voter turnout from the youth, a pre-voter registration session can be held to inform the sector of the requirements. For students who need to go home to the province to register, group travels and registrations can be organized.
- The momentum and machinery should keep going. Sign-up pages for volunteers can be created.
- Encourage, instead of criticizing, other people to go out of their comfort zones. Start with one's own individual circles: families, officemates, or wherever their influence is.

Group B

- Move on from the results of the midterm elections and continue organizing the sectors. Go back to the communities and create more programs for social protection. The spirit of volunteerism across different sectors must be protected and sustained.
- Keep watch over the major issues within the government.
- Develop and field candidates at the local level. Enliven the party-list system as this is the primary venue for marginalized sectors.

Group C

- Start early and have machinery in place.
- Field female candidates.
- Organize groups centered on youth.

Group D

- Have strategic preparations for the next election. It will take two years to conduct a viable campaign.
- Conduct widespread voter education sessions and registration.





Karina Constantino David at Tindig Pilipinas' People Werpa! on February 25, 2018. Photo from Karina's Facebook account.

In Memoriam

KARINA Constantino David

BY JURGETTE HONCULADA

Karina Constantino-David is one of the foremost figures in the development of feminism in the Philippines. She was an activist, a public servant, and a professor at the College of Social Work and Community Development (CSWCD), University of the Philippines-Diliman.

She was the guitarist-composer of the female singing duo, *Inang Laya*, that performed progressive and feminist songs in anti-martial law rallies during the dictatorship of President Ferdinand Marcos.

She chaired the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC) from 1998 to 1999. She also served as chairperson of the Civil Service Commission (2001-2008) and was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Government Service Insurance System (2010-2016).

Among other groups and organizations, Karina founded Harnessing Self-Reliant

Initiatives and Knowledge (HASIK), a non-government organization involved in urban poor empowerment, gender development, protection of children and adolescents, and housing and livelihood projects.

She also served as consultant in crafting the Philippine Development Plan for Women (1989-1992) and the long-term Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (1995-2025) of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (now the Philippine Commission on Women).

Karina passed away on May 7, 2019. She was 73.

To mark the 40th day of her passing, *Kwentong Kabaro's* fourth installment featured Karina as its main speaker. In a video recorded prior to her passing, she talked about her feminist journey, her take on the feminist movement in the country, and her message to the younger generation, among others.



It is a testament to Karina Constantino David's organizing savvy and political heft that a cross section of *ka-womanan* packed a seminar room at the University of the Philippines College of Social Work and Community Development (UP-CSWCD) on June 22, 2019, to mark the 40th day of her passing. The occasion was the 4th session of *Kwentong Kabaro* co-sponsored by EveryWoman and International Center for Innovation, Transformation and Excellence in Governance (INCITEGov) on the topic "Feminism Through the Eyes of Karina Constantino David", made possible through a video interview with KCD.

Numbering 60+ altogether, we were *lolas* in our 60s and 70s, marrieds or doubles in their 50s

and 40s, and singles in their 30s (and perhaps 20s), a merry mix of women from varied backgrounds (academe, urban poor, workers, NGOs—including an election watchdog, homegrown feminists, et al), reflecting Karina's wondrous reach but also affirming the

Paulo Freire imperative of wedding theory to action.

Praxis, in fact, was the leitmotif of Karina's life. No idle thought, no idle word, no idle action, but one rooted in the other, always. The songs she wrote (or translated such as Pablo Jara's "*Cuando Voy Al Trabajo*") were not sheer whimsy but an odd melding of romance and grit, and yes, a call to arms to women long deadened and defeated by poverty and patriarchy.

Karina would have marveled at the female throng at UP-CSCWD: now boisterous, now quiet, some tearing, others still. The collective body language in the emotion-soaked room was akin to a bottled genie saying, first I must mourn, let me bide



PRAXIS, IN FACT, WAS THE LEITMOTIF OF KARINA'S LIFE.
No idle thought, no idle action, but one rooted in the other, always.



On page 34, top: Lot Ortiz-Luis, Leoncia Garcia, Teresita Quintos Deles, Jurgette Honculada, and Sylvia Claudio giving tribute and sharing their fondest memories of Karina. **Bottom:** Becky Demetillo Abraham singing the hits of Inang Laya; attendees starting their day with an interactive ice-breaker.

On page 35, top: A screenshot from the video interview of Karina. **Right:** Former HASIK staff members Mina Tenorio and Consuelo Añonuevo talking about Karina's rigor and high standards.

my time.

UP-CSWCD dean Sylvia (Guy) Estrada Claudio in her inimitable effervescent manner welcomed the women to this homecoming of sorts, women who had touched base with KCD in one way or the other, claiming her, infused by her words and her spirit for this one day of mutual blessings where each took as much as she gave.

In the opening video, Karina acknowledged her belated feminist awakening. Her first “aha” moment was sparked by the visit of two Ateneo college students seeking an interview with her spouse, sociologist Randy David, on newly-formed BISIG, particularly its “socialist vision”. Karina offered to answer their questions because Randy would be away for an hour and, besides, she wrote the final draft of the “vision” after lengthy group discussions and debate. But the two schoolboys issued

a curt “No, thanks.” The look in their eyes said, “It’s only you.” Uncannily, this was a reprise of her mother’s experience. Letizia Roxas did half of eminent historian (and Karina’s father) Renato Constantino’s writings but did not get full or equal credit, and was mostly consigned to the “background,” as Karina wryly noted.

Life’s ironies and contradictions were not lost on the young Karina (e.g., belonging to a progressive household but with some traditional gender roles). But it was not until her gender awakening, in congruence with a growing women’s movement, that things began to make better sense.

Karina’s contributions to feminist pedagogy are pivotal, including the adaptation of feminist poker from Latin America for Philippine gender sensitivity training (“*Feministang Pusoy*”) and the diagrammatic expression

KARINA WAS A CLASS ACT, MANIFEST IN THE ACCOUNTS AND VIGNETTES THAT Poured OUT OF THE HANDFUL OF SPEAKERS WHO OFTEN EXCEEDED THEIR 10-MINUTE LIMIT.



Top: Photos of the participants during the Kwentong Kabaro session on feminism through the eyes of Karina Constantino David.

On page 37: Kara David, Karina's daughter, takes a "selfie" with the attendees.

“

KARINA IS IN THE DETAILS.

of “Manifestations of Gender Bias”: a circle with five equal parts labeled double burden, violence against women, sex-role stereotyping, subordination, marginalization and, in the center, personhood (low self-esteem). The

circle sits atop a cross, seeming to say that gender and its oppressions are a cross many women bear daily. HASIK is credited with producing the first gender sensitivity training manual in the 80s, and also in pioneering gender sensitivity training for men. Karina called herself an “organic feminist”.

Karina was a class act, manifest in the accounts and vignettes that poured out of the handful of speakers who often exceeded their 10-minute limit. Kara, the Davids’ oldest daughter, spoke of Karina’s intelligent heart and boundless generosity. When Kara sought her advice on how to spend TV reality show winnings amounting to a million pesos, Karina counseled: “If you want something to last, share it with, give it to, others.” Kara started a school in Bicol, a feeding program and an education foundation for poor children. That was over ten years ago and the scholarships are ongoing. Among the many children beneficiaries is a girl who once dove for sea urchins at five years of age to earn money. She is now a teacher.

Three former HASIK staff members, Consuelo (Tata) Lacson (now Añonuevo), Alexandra (Jing) Pura and Mina Tenorio, shared that Karina exacted high standards in everything she did, expressed in the word rigor. Jing toted a bag loaded with paperbacks, proof, she said, of the preparatory readings she had to do (mostly Karina’s articles) for the talk, in a nod to Karina’s standards. Mina said that by rigor Karina meant thinking an activity through from A to Z (if possible), “finding answers to problem areas, preparing for contingencies” and, her CO instincts kicking in, “always looking at the larger picture—what would best benefit the common *tao*?” The HASIK joke was, “Karina is in the details.”

Teresita (Ging) Deles of INCITEGov and Pilipina had worked closely with Karina in the past three decades in many joint projects and campaigns including the birthing and building up of EveryWoman. Ging dwelt on two sets of three Ks to sum up Karina’s character traits and methods of work. In the first instance: sharp analysis (*kilatis*), thinking out of the box (*kalikutan ng isip*), and sense of humor (*kiliti*) to describe her persona. In the second instance: knowing people (*kilala*), song (*kanta*), and reclaiming the power of story and narrative (*kwento*) to describe Karina’s methods.



*The Board of DIWATA, the first funding window managed by women for women, set up in partnership with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). It was a joint project of two women's coalitions, the Women's Action Network for Development (WAND) and the Group of 10 (G-10).
From left to right: Imelda Nicolas, Karina David, Carol Anonuevo, Aida Santos, Princess Nemenzo, and Teresita Quintos Deles./ Photo from Teresita Quintos Deles' presentation.*

Penultimately, Lot Ortiz Luis of *Pwersang Pamayanan Para sa Voluntarismo at Reporma* (PPVR) recounted how Karina charged her with building PPVR in Mandaluyong virtually from scratch, ignoring Lot's protestations that she had just resettled in the country and hardly knew anyone in the area. Such was Karina's style, not taking No for an answer and convincing a flabbergasted Lot that she, inexplicably, was somehow up to the task. With staff and junior colleagues, Karina's marching orders often were (no ifs, no buts)—"Surprise me."

Becky Demetillo Abraham helped open the celebration by leading in a stirring rendition of *Babae Ka*, assisted by daughter Astarte. Later a diffident Becky

said she would only sing "snippets" on account of failing memory and aging vocals. But, lo and behold, Becky amazed the multitude of women by singing entire stanzas and full scores. Maybe the thought that Karina was keenly listening from on high gave Becky a growing force and power that was palpable.

In her taped interview, Karina shared a vignette from the dark days of martial law. Performing at a rally at Mendiola with a military phalanx before them, Becky and Karina were loath to face the battle-ready soldiers. But with the peremptory taunt from the crowd—"Face the soldiers!" (*Harap sa sundalo!*)—*Inang Laya* had to start singing and strumming the guitar.

Pretty soon the soldiers were tapping fingers on their shields and, soon after, faces peeped out from helmets. Few Pinoy are left untouched by *Inang Laya* songs, then as now.

And so the day ended with women's thoughts full of memory and yearning, hearts not quite ablaze but beating faster, and pulses quickening, with the knowledge that sisterhood is bigger than misogyny and male blood lust, and the certainty that the bonds of song and CO and sociopolitical analysis and old-fashioned chitchat would bind together these women across generations, sectors and classes, bonds helped put in place by a grand old dame up there, now turned fairy godmother, Karina Constantino David.





“

Noong 2005, sumali ako sa isang reality show ala amazing race sa telebisyon. Nanalo ako ng 1 million pesos. Hindi ko alam kung paano ko gagastusin ang pera kaya tinanong ko ang mama ko. Napakasimple ng kanyang sinabi:

“Karr, kung gusto mong humaba ang buhay ng anumang bagay, ipamahagi at ibigay mo ito sa iba. Dahil hangga’t nabubuhay sila, nabubuhay ang iyong iniambag na alaala.”

Kaya imbes na bumili ng kotse o ng mamahaling kagamitan na pwede namang masira kalaunan... nagpatayo ako ng eskwelahan, nagsimula ng feeding program at nagpaaral ng mga iskolar. Tama si mama, makalipas ang mahigit sampung taon, buhay pa rin ang sinimulan kong foundation. Tama si mama, kung gusto mong humaba ang buhay ng anumang bagay, ipamahagi at ibigay mo ito sa iba.

Hindi madamot ang aking ina. Hindi siya madamot sa kaalaman. Hindi siya madamot sa oras. Laging handang ibigay ang sarili para sa nakararami.

Kara spoke of Karina's intelligent heart and boundless generosity in her message to the session's attendees.



Kaya kung susundan ang ganitong pag-iisip... hindi namatay ang aking ina. Sa dami ng kanyang mga naturuan, mga pagsubok na nilaban, mga protestang sinalihan, at mga taong pinahalagahan... hindi mamamatay si Karina Constantino David. Mahaba ang kanyang buhay at patuloy siyang nabubuhay... sa akin at sa inyo.

Hangga't may mga social worker na handang magmalasakit sa kapwa...
hangga't may mga guro na walang pagod na nagtuturo...
hangga't may mga aktibista na patuloy na sisigaw, aawit at lalaban sa katiwalian...
hangga't may mga kawani ng gobyerno na nananatiling tapat sa serbisyo...
hangga't may mga babae na titindig para sa kanilang karapatan at kalayaang pumili ng sariling landas...

hangga't patuloy nating isinasabuhay ang mga sinimulan ni Karina Constantino David... hindi siya kailanman mamamatay.

Mahirap man mabuhay bilang isang babae sa panahon ngayon, sa panahon ng pambabastos at pagbabalewala sa ating mga karapatan at kakayahan... Sana hindi tayo matakot. Sana patuloy tayong tumindig.

*Kasi alam ko hanggang sa langit,
patuloy si mama sa pakikibaka.*

Maraming salamat po sa inyong dasal at pagmamahal. Ipagpatuloy natin ang sinimulan ni Karina. Buhayin natin siya hindi lang sa alaala kundi sa ating araw-araw na pakikibaka.

Maraming salamat.

Mabuhay ang Pilipina!

On page 38, from left to right: Inang Laya, the duo of Karina and Becky Demetillo Abraham, in the 1980s/Photo from Every Woman's Facebook page • Karina with former social welfare secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman and former peace process secretary Teresita "Ging" Quintos Deles during a visit with detained senator Leila de Lima/Photo from Every Woman's Facebook page • Karina and husband, sociologist Randy David, taking a "selfie"/Photo from Kara David's Facebook account • Inang Laya performing at Tindig Pilipinas' People Werpa! on February 25, 2018/Photo from Every Woman's Facebook page

Photos from the inauguration of the newly-constructed Project Malasakit DayCare Center at Sitio PayPay Ama in Bansud Mindoro Oriental. Toys, school supplies and groceries were distributed to 100 mangyan children of Sitio Buhuan and Sitio Gubot. One hundred Mangyan families also received portable solar power kits and groceries, and were taught the basics of solar energy./ Photos courtesy of Project Malasakit by Kara David Facebook page





Photos of the Peace Palace in The Hague and the courtroom where the arbitral tribunal held its deliberations on the Philippines' case versus China/Photos from Abigail Valte's presentation

JULY 2019

Attin to:
The West
Philippine Sea
Story

BY ATTY. ABIGAIL DE LA FUENTE-VALTE



On July 12, 2016, an arbitral tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands ruled that the West Philippine Sea—a part of the disputed South China Sea—belongs to the Philippines. It also invalidated China’s “nine-dash line” claim and pointed out that China behaved unlawfully and had violated the Philippines’ sovereign rights in its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf. The ruling also noted that China’s recent large-scale reclamation and construction of artificial islands in the Spratlys have caused severe harm to country’s the coral reef environment.

The Philippine delegation was composed of 48 members from the three branches of the government. Of this, only two were women: then Justice secretary Leila de Lima and former deputy presidential spokesperson, Abigail de la Fuente-Valte.

To mark the third anniversary of the arbitral award, July 27’s *Kwentong Kabaro* featured a talk with Valte where she discussed the West Philippine Sea story. Apart from learning some inside stories, the *kabaros* also gained additional insights on the legal battle and why it is important for Filipinos to assert the country’s claim, especially under an administration that ignores and refuses to protest China’s continuing presence and aggression in the area.



“Justice,” emblazoned on the marble floor of the Peace Palace/ Photo from Abigail Valte’s presentation

Justice.

This word was emblazoned on the marble floor of the Peace Palace in The Hague that greeted the members of the Philippine delegation as we filed in, one by one, through the security scanner at the front door. I stopped to take a photo, and whispered to myself: “*Sana nga, sana nga.*”

There was a slight chill in the air on that summer day in July 2015, the first-ever Hearing on Jurisdiction set by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) for what was a modern-day David versus Goliath story: Republic of the Philippines v. People’s Republic of China. Both countries were locked in conflict over China’s claim to what my colleague Manolo Quezon cheekily refers to as the “Sea of Many Names”.

The story began a few decades ago when China started taking over certain areas in what is universally known as the South China Sea. For the Philippines, the tensions came to a head in 2012 with the standoff between the two sides in Bajo de Masinloc, 124 nautical miles (roughly 230 kilometers) from the shore of Zambales.

In 2013, the Philippine government under President Benigno S. Aquino III, made the decision to take China to court, as hundreds of diplomatic notes, numerous high-level discussions, and all possible diplomatic interventions known to man failed to stop China’s juggernaut. President Aquino put his trust in the international legal system, where all nations stand equal, regardless of size, economy, or military power.

My role in the affair was simple—to be the spokesperson for the entire delegation. The PCA does not allow media coverage of the hearings, but it was important for our people back at home to know exactly what was going on. And so it came to pass that I was the writer, producer, photographer, and spokesperson throughout the hearings, so that the members of the legal team could devote their time entirely to the task at hand.

The mood was somber in the coaster that brought us to the Peace Palace. I found out then what Harry Potter must have felt like when he saw Hogwarts Castle for the first time: in awe, but excited for the challenge to come, bearing the weight of our country’s expectations. Unlike the



Left: A map showing China's "nine-dashed line" claim; Below: Lawyer Paul Reichler, Philippines' lead counsel, meets with the country's delegation/ Photos from Abigail Valte's presentation



imaginary wizarding world of Harry Potter, however, there was no magic wand to make this all go away, no potion to de-escalate the tension. It took hard work, conviction that your legal position is on the right side of the law, and a clear vision of what was at stake, to deliver a historic win for the Philippines.

As we drove up the driveway, someone said, "There are people protesting." Nervous sighs transformed into whooping, cheering, and clapping when we realized the protesters were carrying signs that said, "China OUT!" and "West PH Sea is ours!—PH" It still gives me goosebumps to this day, that singular memory of fellow Pinoys gathered together to show support for their country. We smiled and waved at them, flashed thumbs-up signs, boosted by the unexpected display of patriotism.

It goes without saying that the journey to the Hague was not filled with rainbows and unicorns. The Aquino administration was criticized by some quarters for hiring foreign, and not Filipino lawyers. I posed this question to Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio when I happened to sit beside him on the bus one day, and he kindly explained that Paul Reichler, our lead

counsel and the members of Foley Hoag were specialists in this kind of case—their legal careers were built solely on arguing a specific field, akin to surgeons who perform only open-heart surgeries day in and day out. When I asked if he knew anyone back home who could come close to the specialized practice of our legal team, he shook his head. "Not even you?" I asked. His answer showed the depth of humility of Antonio Carpio: "Not even me."

The naysayers also picked on the composition of the delegation, questioning why the Speaker of the House and members of the Cabinet, led by then-Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa, Jr. had to be part of it. The reason is simple: the Philippines had to show a united front as it challenged a behemoth in defense of its sovereign rights. That meant drafting the leaders of the three branches of government – the Executive, Legislature, and the Judiciary – to support the effort with their presence and send the message that the Philippines is united in this effort.

Initially we considered suggesting to President Aquino that he attend the hearing himself. In the end, it became too complicated to figure

**IT DID NOT JUST
BECOME AN ISSUE OF
SOVEREIGNTY OR OF
SOVEREIGN RIGHTS,
BUT ALSO OF
INTERGENERATIONAL
RESPONSIBILITY.
MORE THAN OWNERSHIP,
THIS IS ABOUT MAKING
SURE THAT THE
FILIPINOS CONTINUE
TO HAVE WHAT WE
HAVE NOW.**



Photos of the members of the Philippine delegation in The Hague, taken in-between the hearings/ Photos from Abigail Valte's presentation

out, with protocol and regulations, scheduling changes, security preparations, plus the fact that the Filipino people would certainly mind having their president absent for a week.

I managed to convince Executive Secretary Ochoa to go instead, being the “Little President”. He agreed, with the President’s permission. That trip to the Netherlands was his first and last official trip in his six years of service in Malacañang. Speaker Feliciano “Sonny” Belmonte confirmed his attendance, and so did Senate President Franklin Drilon. Unfortunately, Senator Drilon could not come at the last minute, as he was detained by other responsibilities in the Senate. Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno declined the invitation, citing the possibility that a case might be filed with the Supreme Court to challenge the Aquino administration’s decision to go to the arbitral tribunal. In the end, the Judiciary was represented by Justices Carpio and Francis Jardeleza, and Sandiganbayan Justice Sarah Jane Fernandez.

While I had studied for the hearings ahead of time, there was a lot more that I learned while observing the proceedings. It was a punishing schedule: the hearings would start promptly at 9 a.m., go on straight through the day, stopping only for the requisite meal and two bathroom breaks. The members of the audience were not allowed to speak nor use electronic devices while the tribunal was in session. I relied on a notebook and pen to furiously jot down everything being said so I could accurately deliver updates to the press and the public. (I still keep the two notebooks I filled to this day.)

After the hearing, our legal team would meet to discuss the questions propounded by the members of the arbitral tribunal, so answers could be prepared and delivered the next day. So it went for the next week or so, and the first round was finished.

The Hearing on Jurisdiction was important: our performance there would determine whether we could present the actual merits of the case in a subsequent hearing. After the July proceedings, the arbitral tribunal would have to determine whether it had the authority to take on the case. Otherwise, it could dismiss the case outright. With bated breath, we hoped that it would not be game over for the Philippines.

By the end of October 2015, we were knee-deep in preparations for the hosting of the APEC Economic Leaders Week in Manila, when we received the good news: the Philippines had won the first round. This meant that the legal team would have to return to the Hague to face the equally challenging task of presenting the merits of our position to the arbitral tribunal, with the hope that we could convince them on all 16 of our claims relative to China's nine-dash line. It was close to two weeks of presenting, day in and day out, with each of the claims detailed by the Philippines: why China's claim of historic rights has no basis in international law, the militarization by China of disputed islands to strengthen its grip on the disputed areas, how China violated its obligation under international law to preserve the environment when it conducted dredging activities for reclamation, and so on.

What struck me the most during these hearings was the testimony of independent expert Professor Kent E. Carpenter on the extent of the damage caused to our marine ecosystem by China's dredging activities. Carpenter, a marine biologist, called the damage "catastrophic" and that it will take a generation to repair, which immediately brought to mind the issue of intergenerational responsibility. Will our children have the chance to experience the beauty of our country when wide swathes of our seas are being destroyed before our very eyes? Will they have enough to eat in the future when, as we speak, our fishermen are prevented from fishing in our own seas, shooed away as Chinese fishermen ravage our waters for giant clams, fish, and whatever else they find?

It is unfortunate that even among our people, apologists for China exist. They defend China's aggression, touting the advantages of "the springtime of PH-China relations" because of the current dispensation's friendship with China. But to me, no matter how they try to muddy and complicate the issue, it is quite simple: more than asserting our rights and stopping China's aggression through the sword of the law, the arbitral case was about making sure that Filipinos continue to enjoy having what is ours. It may not be a lot compared to what more prosperous countries have, but it is important that we ensure its preservation for the future generations of Filipinos.



Photos of guest speaker Abigail de la Fuente-Valte and the session's attendees during the open forum



Kwentuhang Kabaro

The WPS story is the story of ordinary citizens

To the ordinary Filipino, especially the fisherfolk, the dispute is a threat to their livelihood and subsistence. It is the plight of the fishermen that has brought this issue closer to our hearts. The symbolism of our homes being taken away resonates even with those who do not fully understand the technicalities of the dispute.

The environmental issue is intergenerational

The dredging China is doing is indiscriminate. There is a clear failure to protect the environment. The independent team sent by the tribunal was shocked at the extent of the damage and stated that it will take 50 years to repair. If this continues, the outcome may be irreversible.

Enforcing the Hague Ruling

One criticism of the ruling is that it has no teeth. The tribunal does not have the mandate to compel the losing party to comply with the decision. Because of this, the Philippine delegation's strategy in the event of a win was to use a multilateral approach by relying on international pressure as probably the best way to enforce the ruling.

China is already a world superpower. If they want to maintain this position, they must follow international law. Otherwise, the international community will not give them recognition.

International support and setting a precedent

Prior to the case, there was already a general international consensus that the rule of law must be respected. Observers from different countries were very supportive. Other smaller countries are using the Philippines' case to prepare for their own similar challenges.

Winning can serve as a good precedent; it could mean that other countries can take China to court and do the same.

Ideally, smaller countries must come together and utilize our numbers against the superpower. However, the Philippines having flipped its stance, countries that once lauded our achievement are now wary of working alongside us. Regardless, other countries have maintained the pressure in upholding the ruling.



Putting together a communications strategy

The concept of sovereignty is so abstract. The challenge is to make the issue simple and understandable. The stories of ordinary Filipinos must be put at the forefront, but the narrative is being controlled and distorted by none other than our very own government. Therefore, a clear message must be made and sustained to counter this. This messaging must be crafted such that people discern the culprits to be the Chinese government and not the Chinese people themselves.

Public opinion is with fighting for the West Philippine Sea. This a thorn in the Duterte administration's side, and we must ensure that it stays this way.

Pushing back despite the fearmongering

Although a war between two nations is entirely possible, it will take a lengthy process. No country would want war for its own people; it is always the last resort. This is why we must push back. As is has historically shown, China tends to retreat once a nation starts fighting and defending itself.

However, our own administration has made it difficult for citizens to stand up, overtly harassing those who do, and cultivating a culture of fear in the process.

Taking action

Given that the current administration may well be a lost cause at this point, citizens must take action and utilize whatever is within our individual capacities. We must go back to our organizations and do the work to ensure that the conversation is kept going. However, staying within the narrow margins of our own spheres of influence only does so much. There must be lines of communication to a wider audience.

One concrete remedy is to go back to the ballot box and exercise our right to vote. This can ensure that the right people are influencing policies and focusing on the long game. The results of 2022 may well be do-or-die.



BABAWAL BABASTOS

RECLAIMING SAFE
SPACES FOR
WOMEN

BY VERLIE Q. RETULIN

A motorcycle rider grabs a female pedestrian's private part in broad daylight.
A closed circuit television camera catches the act.

A middle-aged man gropes a female passenger on a bus, he nudges her breast with his elbow then touches it. The victim records the act on her mobile phone.

These are not isolated events. They happen regularly in our public spaces.

TO WOMEN, THE STREET IS A DAILY BATTLEFIELD.

Three in 5 women aged 18 to 24 years old experience sexual harassment in Quezon City. Of these cases, 58 percent took place on the streets and small alleys, in public vehicles, public washrooms, schools, and workplaces.

This is the Social Weather Stations baseline study on street sexual harassment and sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces released in 2016.

The Center for Women's Resources also reported that one woman or child is raped every hour in the Philippines, citing 2016 data.

"Lahat na ng klaseng karumal-dumal na pwedeng gawin ng tao sa kapwa niya, ginagawa sa babae (All the worst things that people can do to each other have been done to women)," INCITEGov's Yasmin Busran Lao said in August's *Kwentong Kabaro*.

In its sixth installment, the ongoing series saw women and gender rights advocates gather to discuss the passage of milestone laws and what's next for the sector. Senator Ana Theresia "Risa" Hontiveros-Baraquel, chair of the

senate committee on women, children, family relations and gender equality, was one of the guests.

Unsafe space

Harassment in public based on gender is a daily reality lived by women and can take many forms, from catcalling and wolf-whistling to groping and stalking, to name a few.

To shield themselves from the dangers posed by walking alone in the streets, women have to go the extra mile.

"May mga nakausap ako na para lang makaiwas sila na ma-catcall o mabastos, naghahanap sila ng ibang way. So 'yung gastos, 'yung pagod, para lang sa hindi sila mabastos sa daan (I've talked with some women who had to find another route to avoid getting catcalled. All those additional efforts and costs just to save themselves from unwanted attacks)," Joanna Caumeran, one of the attendees, shared.

Women are often advised to "just go home early," but even this is not always a choice available for all, Caumeran said. There will still be female students who have to stay out until midnight to

finish a group project, or female night shift employees who have to leave their house when everyone else is about to sleep.

"Dapat i-reclaim natin 'yung space na para sa atin (We should reclaim our own space)," Caumeran said. *"Hindi 'yung hinahayaan natin ang iba na mag-perpetrate ng kabastusan, na nasa kanila ang power (We shouldn't let other people perpetrate lewdness by giving them power),"* she added.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) defines "safe space" as a formal or informal place where women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe.

"The term 'safe,' in the present context, refers to the absence of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence), or abuse. It is a space where women and girls, being the intended beneficiaries, feel comfortable and enjoy the freedom to express themselves without the fear of judgment or harm," UNFPA stated.

By this definition, the Philippines still has a long way to go.



Senator Risa Hontiveros (left) and her chief legal counsel, lawyer Jaye de la Cruz-Bekema (right), explained the salient points of the Bawal Bastos Law.

Safe Spaces Act of 2019

In April last year, the Philippines enacted Republic Act 11313 or the Safe Spaces Act of 2019 to penalize unwanted comments, gestures, and actions by one person against another in public space.

The law has criminalized gender-based streets and public spaces sexual harassment which it defines as “any advances, whether verbal or physical, that is unwanted and has threatened one’s sense of personal space and physical safety, and committed in public spaces such as alleys, roads, sidewalks and parks.”

These include catcalling; wolf-whistling; unwanted invitations; misogynistic, transphobic, homophobic and sexist slurs; persistent uninvited comments or gestures on a person’s appearance; relentless requests for personal details; statement of sexual comments and suggestions; public masturbation or flashing of private parts; and groping.

The Safe Spaces Act is an expansion of Republic Act 7877 or the Anti-Sexual Harassment Law.

Lawyer Jaye de la Cruz-Bekema, Hontiveros’ chief legal counsel, identified four salient features of the law: 1) it highlights street harassment, which was previously penalized by city ordinances only; 2) it also penalizes harassment done online; 3) it penalizes peer-to-peer and subordinate-to-superior harassment; and 4) it puts positive obligations on the school and its administrators to create an environment that has zero tolerance on sexual harassment.

“The intent of the law is to cover harassment in multiple domains of women and men, and people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE),” de la Cruz said.

While advocates are happy with the passage of the law, they agree that it’s only another step forward. Much work still needs to be done, particularly in raising awareness on women and gender rights, both in one’s own home and in the community where they belong.

After all, the creation of a safe space is a concerted effort that goes beyond policies printed on paper.

‘Ano ba ang bastos?’

When the Safe Spaces Act was still being deliberated on, Hontiveros recalled that even her fellow lawmakers have sought to understand what constitutes an offense under this law.

“Ano ba talaga ang bastos? Ano ba ang bawal (What is considered lewd? What acts are prohibited?)” some of them inquired.

Some even raised sexist and misogynistic arguments. “Eh paano kung nahipo lang (What if the person was just touched?)”

For feminist and gender rights advocates, these questions might come off as shocking, even scandalous, and certainly offensive, Hontiveros said. “However, I’ve learned that beyond our echo chamber, so many people have a difficult time understanding gender rights, even when they say they support it,” she explained.

“We just have to keep presenting anecdotes, real-life stories, and data.”

Participants share their perspectives on the topic and the issues surrounding it during the session's open forum



'Community-based advocacy'

Discussions on these topics, however, should not only be limited to the level of policymakers and advocates. Instead, such policies should be crafted and implemented in coordination with different institutions as well as the women in the communities.

"Hindi tayopwedeng mag-usap na mataas lagi ang lebel. Sana may drive sa community para mas makita kung ano talaga ang problema sa ilalim (Our conversations should not always be at a high level. We should also go down to communities so we can know, firsthand, what their problems are)," Natividad Pilipina of the Nagkakaisang Tinig at Hakbang ng Kababaihan sa Calocan said.

On the other hand, Beth Yang of PILIPINA pointed out that much of the work in the past focused on making duty bearers accountable. Less attention was given to ensure that people really understand the law and how it's supposed to change everyday life.

"We want to make sure that our partner organizations and women's organizations, will understand the law so that they can make officials accountable. But in terms of making sure that it is popularized within the community, *hindi talaga siya tumatagos* (it really doesn't permeate)," Yang said.

Hontiveros found the possibilities of community-based action inspiring. "What if we stage a dramatization of a gender sensitivity training and invite the media and the bloggers to cover it through social media?" she suggested.

"Then we'll reach more audience who will learn more and, hopefully, will follow the law."

She also urged the sector to come up with possible creative actions that will leave an impact on both the public and the advocates themselves.

"Sabay-sabay na mga initiatives na, kahit hindi napakalaki sa simula, pwedeng mag-meld into each other sa isang ecosystem (We can come up with small, simultaneous initiatives that can eventually meld into each other in one ecosystem)," Hontiveros said.

She also noted that *Bantay Bastos*, a social media campaign that aims to hold public figures and people of influence accountable for their words and actions, is already a good start.

The role of parents and educational institutions

Educational institutions also play a key role in raising awareness on women and gender rights. For instance, Hontiveros suggested that schools can teach students about the basic tenets of respect for women and individual rights.

“Dapat habang tinatrabaho natin ang pang-unawa ng kababaihan ay tinatrabaho rin natin sa umpisa pa lamang ang pang-unawa ng kahalakihan (While we work on raising women’s awareness, we should also work on the men’s from the beginning),” she said.

Caumeran agreed, adding that men should also be included in the discourse so they can understand these laws and what these laws mean to them. *“Yung iba sa kanila, hindi lang nila alam (Some of them are simply not aware).”*

“Let’s make the environment more conducive so that they can be deterred from doing such unacceptable behavior and so they will know that they will be punished in doing so,” Hontiveros added.

This, Hontiveros said, requires people from different disciplines—feminist anthropologists, historians and theologians, to name a few—to come together and untangle the past, present, and future of the women’s movement.

Meanwhile, Lot Ortiz Luis of the People Power Volunteers for Reform also noted the importance of proper parenting, particularly in dealing with children who are in the process of discovering their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

“Ang safe space sa bata, dapat nag-uumpisa sa tahanan (The concept of safe space among children should start at home),” she said.

‘Politics of presence’

Aside from the Safe Spaces Act, 2019 also saw the enactment of another milestone law: Republic Act 11210 or the “105-Day Expanded Maternity Leave Law.”

“Women labor organizations were the real champions of that law, from the committee hearings to the plenary debates,” Hontiveros said.

Prior to its passage, the bill also faced similar opposition, this time from the business sector who worried about its impact on productivity and the additional costs on employers that it will incur.

However, during the bicameral hearing, de la Cruz observed that women lawmakers supported each other and pushed for the bill’s passage despite coming from different political persuasions.

“Dahil pare-pareho silang ina, pare-pareho nilang naranasan ang childbirth, nagsama-sama sila (Because they are all mothers and they all experienced childbirth, they united) to assert that 105 days is what’s necessary for a woman to recover and for an infant to be nurtured. That is the importance of the politics of presence,” she explained.



WHAT DO WE DO IN THE FACE OF AN UNRELENTING STORM?

We keep sailing.

To ensure that such force will continue to manifest in upcoming legislations, Hontiveros raised the possibility of forming issue-based coalitions inside and outside of Congress that will forward women and gender advocacies, regardless of political lines.

“We really need mass movements behind our legislation,” de la Cruz said.

For the 18th Congress, the bills on SOGIE Equality and Absolute Divorce, as well as the Expanded Solo Parents’ Welfare Act are Hontiveros’ priority legislations. Meanwhile, measures that aim to prevent teenage pregnancies and raise the age of sexual consent to 18



years old were among the senator’s pet bills.

‘Unrelenting storm’

Outside the communities and the legislative branch, Hontiveros drew her attention to pronouncements against women and for constantly enabling violence and misogyny despite the passage of key laws aimed at combating these.

Lao raised that there should be studies that will examine the source of all the hatred and violence directed against women, saying its manifestations vary for every generation.

“Gusto kong maintindihan kung saan ba nanggagaling ‘yan? Bakit hanggang ngayon, parang hindi ‘yan napipigilan (I want to understand where it’s coming from and why it persists to this day),” Lao said.

“We have a president who is unapologetic in his machismo, and through his actions and the actions of his inner circle, he is teaching the Filipino people to be as misogynistic and as shameless as him,” Hontiveros said.



The attendees of the session with guest speaker, Senator Risa Hontiveros.

“What do we do in the face of something like this?” she asked the participants. “What do we do in the face of an unrelenting storm?”

“We keep sailing,” Hontiveros said. “If my experiences with our legislative victories taught me anything, it is that storms, no matter how strong, end.”

Hontiveros knows whereof she speaks. The Safe Spaces Act after all has weathered its own storm. In the process of passing the law, one senator asked them to remove the phrase “transphobic and homophobic slurs” in the bill and just retain “misogynistic slurs.”

“Because that senator was in a position to actually stop a bill in its tracks, we had to deliberate whether to retain ‘transphobic, homophobic slurs’ for the LGBTQIA community, or just remove it so that the bill will still pass in its watered down form,” de la Cruz said.

Fortunately, they were able to dodge the issue when they realized that the House of Representatives’ version of the bill—which the chamber had already approved—retained the contested provision.

bicameral conference.”

And so they did, and the final version that contained the phrase “misogynistic, transphobic, homophobic and sexist slurs” landed on the president’s table for approval.

“Sometimes, we don’t need blazing canon balls to pass milestone reforms. Sometimes, we smuggle it in,” de la Cruz said. “The wisdom there is to know how to use tactics when it’s necessary. Now, we have a Safe Spaces Law that includes transphobic, homophobic and misogynistic slurs. And at the end of the day, I think that’s what matters,” she added.

“But how long will it take for social change to happen after the laws were passed?” Rina Jimenez David of PILIPINA asked.

“*Naku po, inay* (Oh, dear mother),” Hontiveros sighed. Her reaction drew laughter from the crowd, signaling a collective acknowledgment that it’s still a long battle ahead.

“Every cultural change that a law promises could take at least a generation. Twenty years,” she explained.

At that point, de la Cruz said it was just a matter of tactics.

“We decided to just reinsert the provision during the

Despite this, Hontiveros remains optimistic. “*OK lang. Sanay tayo sa matagalang laban. Alam nating mananalo tayo* (It’s okay, we’re used to long battles. We know that eventually, we are going to win),” she said with a hopeful smile.



CULTURAL CHANGE IS NOT JUST OUR LIFE’S WORK; IT’S GENERATIONAL.

Sometimes the victories we win today are not for us, they are for those who come after.

‘My body is my country’

For Hontiveros, a woman’s ownership of her body should be asserted in the same way that Filipinos are defending the country’s sovereignty.

“*Katawan natin ito* (This is our body). This is our country. *Gusto natin, meron tayong kasarinlan* (We want to have our own independence.) To be able to freely express ourselves,” she said.

“We just have to keep arguing and arguing for it *habang dahan-dahan, kahit sapilitan, na nababago ‘yung kaisipan nila* (while we slowly, even forcibly, change people’s mindsets),” Hontiveros added.

DADAH LEAVES THE HOUSE BUT comes home

BY VERLIE Q. RETULIN

In one event that Sitti Djalía “Dadah” Turabin-Hataman attended for the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), she was treated as “the secretary of Mujiv Hataman.”

Dadah, 43, had worked for almost a decade as secretary general of the Moro Human Rights Center by then and had founded Pinay Kilos (Pink!), a nongovernment organization that focuses on empowering women in the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi.

Never mind that she was attending the event as NCMF’s executive director,

people assumed that she was there to represent her husband, Mujiv Hataman, who was then the party-list representative for Anak Mindanao (AMIN), one of the groups she helped organize before they became a couple.

“Personally, that’s OK for me,” she said. “But I also have an office to represent. So I asked myself, *‘Masyado na ba akong nagmamataas porke’t opisyal na ako* (Am I being arrogant because I am already a government official)? Is it right to assert my identity?’”

In another gathering that she attended, this time with her husband, the

organizers prevented her from speaking because, they said, Mujiv already spoke and they didn’t want it to look like a family affair.

“Why am I the one who has to give way?” Dadah felt aggrieved because she helped conceptualize the event in the first place.

The turning point, Dadah says, happened in yet another event, when then peace secretary Teresita Quintos Deles introduced her as “the executive director of the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos who is, incidentally, the wife of Mujiv Hataman.”

A woman wearing a black hijab and a green top is shown in profile, looking out a window. The window has a dark wooden frame and is divided into several panes. Outside the window, a bright blue sky and a building with a green roof are visible. The woman has a slight smile on her face.

me

Then it dawned on her.
“Incidentally. It just so happened that I am his wife and that we’ve been partners in so many things,” Dadah said.
“But I have my own identity. I am my own me.”

In September 28’s *Kwentong Kabaro*, Dadah shared her story as a Moro and a Muslim woman, including her hopes, struggles, and how she managed to stay true to her identity.



Dadah as the representative of Anak Mindanao/ Photos courtesy of Anak Mindanao Partylist



ANAK
AMINDANAO
PARTYLIST

Emerging from the shadows

Leading the NCMF from 2010 to 2013 marked the beginning of Dadah's political career. In 2013, AMIN tapped her to run as their first nominee at the House of Representatives. The group, however, bounced off the idea with Mujiv, who was by then governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), before taking it up with Dadah.

This made Dadah furious. "Are you asking me because you believe in me or because I am the wife of Mujiv?" she asked, stressing that this should be cleared right from the start because she and her husband have different leadership styles.

If people thought she would not be able to make her own decisions without her husband's consent, the couple proved them wrong. Senior members would still consult Mujiv before talking to her but Mujiv would always tell them, "*Huwag ako. Siya ang kausapin ninyo* (Talk to her, not me)."

Rude awakening

Dadah's first term as a lawmaker was not smooth-sailing. The Sabah crisis and the Zamboanga siege in 2013 and the Mamasapano clash in 2015 all happened during her first term in office.

She also had to contend with the realities of being a Muslim leader, among them the prevailing fear and prejudice against Muslims which she witnessed first-hand through her peers in the House. "Is that what you think of us?" she would often think to herself, especially during committee meetings.

But the more heartbreaking one was realizing how people's expectations changed when she crossed over from nongovernment to government work.

"At the NGO, people are very much willing to welcome you and help in your advocacies because they know that you're not pursuing other interests," Dadah said. "But when you're a congresswoman, the expectation turns into, 'She has the government's money so she can meet any and all of our demands.'"

"I have a problem with that," she said. "*Lahat ng gawin kong mabuti, pagdududahan kasi nga isa akong Hataman. Not for anything, pero nanghihinayang ako doon sa message na pwedeng ibigay ng ginagawa namin* (Everything I do raises doubts because I am a Hataman. Not for anything, but I feel deep regret for the message that we wanted to convey)."

It was then Dadah decided not to gun for a second term. The decision did not materialize, however, as AMIN failed to find another nominee to take her place. Dadah ran for a second term in 2016.



Know how deeply rooted I am here, for it is from these roots that I claim my stake.

This is my home.



Coming into her own

During her second stint, she had to deal with one of the Duterte administration's priority legislations: the revival of the death penalty in the Philippines.

Dadah, a human rights advocate, was against the death penalty. Sharia Law, on the other hand, provides for one. She was torn, but she took solace in one Islamic teaching that she holds dear: "God is the most just and most merciful."

She consulted Muslim religious leaders and learned that the Sharia Law, which is seen as harsh and brutal, provides a clear manifestation of God's infinite mercy and compassion toward His creations.

In her speech in Congress to explain her vote, she said: "And I, foremost as a Muslim and more essentially as a human being, cannot afford to transgress this mercy every creation is entitled to. *Sarili ko pong buhay hindi ko kayang panagutan* (I can't even answer for my own life), I cannot afford, and is most afraid, to be held accountable for another life, even just one life. Thus, I vote No."

Coming home

A year into her second term, on May 23, 2017, the Marawi siege happened. Armed individuals inspired by and

aligned with the international terror group Daesh attempted to take over Marawi City. The ensuing fighting resulted in multiple deaths and injuries, massive infrastructure destruction, loss of properties and livelihood, and displacement of thousands of residents, among others.

It was again a time for introspection for Dadah who felt that the conflict happened partly because the community felt that they were left behind.

"Although there are many factors that led to the incident, it is a known fact that our people's, particularly our youth's, frustrations over the seeming loss of our struggles, the imminent failure to realize our aspirations, became a vulnerable sentiment used by these groups to their advantage," Dadah said in a privilege speech.

"Where did we fail? When and how did we lose them?" she asked.

She couldn't shake off the nagging feeling that had she remained in the communities and talked about peace, she could have convinced a child or two that peace was possible.

In October, weeks before the liberation of Marawi, Dadah stepped down from her post to go back to the communities that she first served, to knock on every

household and appeal to the hearts and minds of the children.

In her last privilege speech before her colleagues in the House, Dadah said: "Going back does not only mean being with them physically. It also means, for me, being heard when I speak, not as a person of influence or power, but as me. It also means, being spoken to without the barrier of a title or a position, just me."

Dadah felt that people in grassroots communities won't listen to her if she stays in power because they will only see her as a politician and part of a government that they consider an enemy.

"How will I be able to reach out to them if I am an agent of the institution that they do not trust?" she asked.

After her resignation, she continued to work with Pink! and AMIN Foundation. She focused on issues concerning culture and identity and later organized the exhibit, "Muslims of the Philippines: History and Culture."

Dadah realized that it's easier to connect Muslims with the rest of the Filipinos through culture. She found truth in one of her children's remarks: "The Filipino people do not hate us. It's just that they do not know us."



A mural expressing support of Dadah's mayoral bid during the 2019 elections. / Photo courtesy of Jamar Martinez Abubakar

Reentering politics

With Dadah back in the grassroots, it seemed as if life has come full circle for her. But her story is far from over.

A year after her resignation, her supporters asked her to run for office again, this time as mayor of Isabela City, Basilan. "I was consistent in saying, 'No, I don't want to,'" she said. "Ayoko, ayoko, ayoko."

Those around her were intrigued. "Why don't you want to run?" they asked. "We thought you wanted to help the people and the community?"

Dadah, who felt her journey had led her to the realization that being a politician was not who she was, resisted the calls for her to run. "This is not me," she said.

She found an ally in her eldest child who told Mujiv that he's lucky to have them both as parents because they are totally

different people and he gets the best from each of them. "But *Ama*, if you insist on making *Ina* like you, I will get two of you and I'll lose my *Ina*," their eldest child said.

On the other hand, she knew that being a local chief executive would put her in the best position to help the community she came home for.

It became a struggle to say "No." Days before the filing period, Mujiv told her, "Just face your supporters and tell them that you're not running and it's final."

On the last day of filing for candidacy, she decided to go to the poll office to tell her supporters her decision. Her husband, who filed his candidacy for representative of the lone district of Basilan the day before, was with her.

The entire trip to the venue was agonizing, she felt like she was being led to her execution. "What's worse," she told Mujiv, "is that you're the one who's taking me there."

Dadah was not prepared for what she saw when she got to the venue. Perhaps it's the number of people present or the hopeful look on their faces that triggered the gush of tears, then, eventually, the change of heart. "I saw them and I just cried," she said. "This is beyond me," she told herself.

While the decision was sudden, Dadah has stood by it since. "I offer no excuse for doing now what I vehemently and repeatedly said I will not do," Dadah has said in a statement. "No, I will not parrot the traditional politician's statement, '*Gusto kasi ng tao*' (because this is what the people want). I take full responsibility for this decision."

She told her supporters she will run but she will not campaign for herself. "I'm proud to say that I finished the entire campaign period without telling the people to vote for me," she said.

Instead, her visit to the communities involved discussions on governance, financial literacy, and interfaith sessions. "For me, if you're going down to the communities, you might as well



give them something. Whether or not you win in the elections, if you're able to change their mindsets, no matter how small the change, that's already a victory on its own."

Muslim woman

Dadah had to respond to several issues thrown her way during the campaign period, including justifying her position on the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). She was in favor of the legislation but Isabela City voted no in the January plebiscite.

"If Dadah wins, she will include Isabela in the Bangsamoro," her opponents said of her. In response, Dadah made sure to explain her vote to the electorate during her community visits. She also let them know that she will stand with the decision of the majority as a Muslim leader, despite her vote.

She also had to respond to accusations that she was just being used by her husband. That, Dadah said, was the biggest lie of all.

She and her female opponent, Cherrylyn Santos-Akbar, had also been on the receiving end of sexist tirades. They were pitted against each other, with attacks that were often shallow and below the belt:

"Idaan na lang sa beauty pageant."
(Let's decide the winner through a beauty pageant.)

"Sino ang mas moral?"
(Who has higher moral standards?)

"Sino ang nagparetoke? Sino ang may karelayson?"

(Who had cosmetic surgery? Who's involved in an illicit affair?)

"It's ugly because they are sensationalizing womanhood," she said, adding that the discussion should always focus on the issues and the candidates' track records.

There was also the issue of religion. As a Muslim, Dadah was painted as anti-Catholic to the people of Isabela, a city with a predominantly Catholic population. But she was unfazed. "If they use religion to divide us, let us use religion to unite us," she told them.

What people did not know is that she spent her grade school and high school in a Catholic school. Thus, she is familiar with Catholicism and has even memorized the prayers and the rosary.

She mentioned this in one of the meetings and was prodded to do a "sample" to find out if she was telling the truth. To her audience's surprise, she was able to recite The Lord's Prayer as well as the Angelus.

"Big mistake," she said. "If that was a trap set by my opponents, then they made a very big mistake."

The experience also allowed Dadah to connect with her future constituents on a deeper level. Now, they are sending her photos of children wearing hijab. "They now wear with pride what was previously seen as a symbol of fear," she said.

Mayor and mother

Husband and wife both won in the elections. Dadah recognizes that their political stature comes with a constant threat to her and her husband's security. Her children have learned to seize each moment she's home, but it's hardest on the youngest who told her, "I did not want to sleep because I do not want to wake up without you."

Aside from the standard protocol, there is an added request from their children: "If you leave, if you go to Basilan, whatever it is that we're doing, make sure that you wake us up and say goodbye. At least give us a chance to say 'I love you' before you leave."

And, even with early flights and five kids to say goodbye to, Dadah always makes sure to fulfill that promise before she leaves.

"Sometimes, when they could not wake up, I'll take a video of myself kissing them and telling them that I love them. Then I'll send it to them so that they'll know that I went to their room before I left," she said.

Leaving a legacy

Dadah once told a group of university students that she never really made a plan; neither did she pray for any of the opportunities that were given to her. Nonetheless, wherever life took her,



From page 58, left to right: Photos of Dadah during her campaign as mayor of Isabela City, Basilan and oath-taking with husband, Mujiv Hataman, who was also elected as representative of the lone district of Basilan. **Below:** A family picture of Dadah and Mujiv with their five children./ Photos from Dadah Turabin-Hataman's Facebook page.

she made it her goal to leave the place in a better state than what she saw upon her arrival. “I know I’m going to leave eventually. Might as well leave something behind—a legacy.”

Each government activity, for instance, should not only be treated as mere accomplishment, she said. Instead, it should also be assessed based on how people benefited from it. Its impact, she stressed, should trickle down to the households.

She still lives by the words she delivered in Congress before she left. “Whatever title or position or status we have, when it no longer serves that purpose, becomes meaningless. There is no higher office or lower rank, what matters is where and how you can serve best. This is a reminder foremost to myself.”

For now, Dadah is home. Back in October when she surprised her family and friends, even herself, for

running, she had to ask forgiveness for failing to inform them earlier of her decision. She said then, “Know how deeply rooted I am here, for it is from these roots that I claim my stake. This is my home.”

KWENTUHANG KABARO

On living with violence and fear

I grew up in Isabela City and conflict is not that common in our area. Still, there were instances when one would hear the sound of gunshots and our parents would come to our school to fetch us. I also had relatives who had to flee from their communities and live with us for months, worrying about the properties they left behind. Mujiv’s clan was also involved in a conflict and there was one incident when seven members of their family died following an ambush.

On going to Christian communities and talking about the experiences of Muslims

It is a good idea to visit communities and hold a dialogue with both Christian and Muslim residents. They each have their own stories and experiences to share, for instance, on the way they were treated by the other group. Aside from current issues, they can also discuss the events that took place in the past and how these shaped the present.

On the political participation of women

The sector needs to be more assertive. We have to be clear that women representatives need to be present in the policymaking process, for instance, to be able to share their perspective as women. It’s not enough that you have a female figure present in a forum; she should also be allowed to speak and participate. What’s worse is that when people disregard the role that women play, it’s actually their subconscious talking. It’s the norm. Thus, I believe



Right: The attendees of the session with guest speaker, Mayor Sitti Djalila Hataman

Below: Photos of the attendees during the open forum



that gender remains to be an issue: it's still there, in the households and even inside our minds. "Huwag na natin pagsalitain si Dadah kasi nagsalita na si Mujiv (No need for Dadah to talk since Mujiv already spoke)." Imagine, if they can do that to a public figure, how much more to regular women?

On measuring the impact of the government's projects to every household

When measuring the success of a program, the indicator should always be its impact on every household, every family. Whatever improvement is happening at the national, regional, or provincial level, if it's not felt at the household level, then it will not matter. If you were able to build a road, the story should not only be about its length, rather, the stories should focus on the number of children who were able to go to school because of it, the number of mothers who used it to get to the hospital, or the number of farmers who crossed it on their way to selling their harvest.

Accomplishments should not be measured by the mere conduct of activities. More importantly, these activities should benefit people. At the same time, our constituents should also be made aware of the government's and the public officials' limitations, particularly in terms of available funding and resources.

On how she plans to institute the changes that she proposed

I'm very happy that there are a number of people who wanted to help. For example, when we called for a clean-up drive on my first day of office, people worked and cleaned the night before. When the day came, there's not much litter left. Balut vendors also began to apply for permits. All of them are witnessing the changes that are happening in Isabela and they also want to do their part.

On my end, I strive to be consistent in all of my policies and actions, even the small details. If I let one or two people off the hook, then I will lose the ascendancy to impose the same policy on everybody.

Our everyday challenge is to do good and to do what is right. It's not easy, especially in the work that we do. Sometimes, solving a problem gives birth to another problem.





A young mother, an old Tatay's promise

BY JOIE CORTINA

Let's call her Tala. She waits in line as the midday sun beats down on her and a few others gathered in a makeshift tent in Balabac, an island six hours by land and four hours by sea from Puerto Princesa.

She doesn't mind the heat. Or the waiting. She has walked four hours to get here and this is the first medical mission that has come to Balabac. The barangay health workers only visit her village every two months, sometimes three.

What's a few more hours to get checked by a health worker, she thinks to herself.

She looks at her son playing not too far from her, his frame too small for a child of 2, as she nurses her baby girl.

Tala is 17.

"It will be best for you to get a hormonal implant," the midwife tells her after asking her a few questions. "Your body is young. Now it needs time to rest from the rigors of pregnancy."

Tala looks at her mother-in-law. The older woman nods. Tala's husband is a fisherman in his 30s who is away for days at sea. In his absence, her mother-in-law is the head of the family. It is the custom in their indigenous community.

Tala was 13 when she became a wife to

her husband.

"First, we do a pregnancy test. We need to make sure that you are not pregnant before we fit you with an implant," the midwife explains.

Tala pees on a white plastic stick. They wait.

Two distinct pink lines appear on the stick. She's pregnant. Again.

The midwife puts down the contraceptive

implant. She reaches for the iron supplements instead. She tells Tala how to take the capsules, "Three times a day, with meals." But Tala only gets one meal in a day, two when the catch is plenty.

Tala gets up and prepares to leave. She wraps the baby in a sling and cradles it close to her breast. She takes her toddler's hand in hers, and clutches the vitamins in the other.

She has a long trek back home.



The writer traveling by boat to Balabac Island.
/Photo from Joie Cortina

Tatay's promise

Tala is not her real name, but she's as real as the need for the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law to work.

I met Tala in my work as a community-based sexual and reproductive health and rights educator, when I was affiliated with a Palawan-based women's health nonprofit organization.

Today, I am interim co-chair of the Reproductive Health and Gender Advocates' Movement (RH AGENDA). Tala and young people like her are at the heart of our organization.

Our focus is on adolescent concerns like sexual and reproductive health; consent in intimate relationships; and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) diversity, to mention a few. We build partnerships with grassroots stakeholders to create learning modules and knowledge products.

My co-chair, Topher Porras, is the author of "*Bahaghari: A Comprehensive Guide to Sex and Sexuality Education for LGBTQIA+ Youth.*"

In our conversations with very young mothers in disadvantaged circumstances, we know that a certain *tatay* has yet to do good on his promise made three years ago.

In his first State of the Nation Address a month into office in July 2016, President

Rodrigo Duterte said, "The implementation of the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law must be put into full force and effect."

He promised that "couples, especially the poor, will have freedom of informed choice in the number and spacing of children they can adequately care and provide for."

I want to hold this *tatay* to his promise. Thus, one Saturday morning in October 2019, I came in solidarity with women representing a robust spectrum of stakeholder sectors.

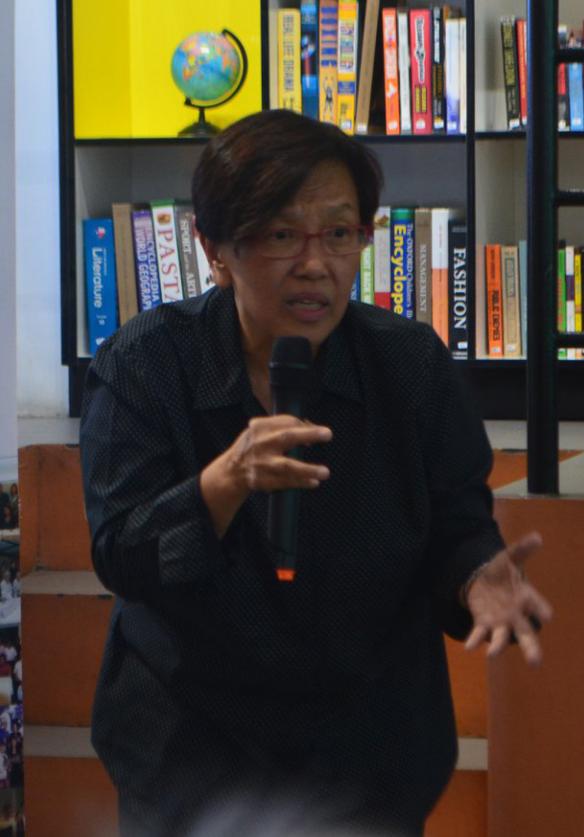
These women gathered to demand the fulfillment of a commitment made, not just by the man in Malacañang, but by the succession of state duty-bearers involved in the decades-long struggle for reproductive health rights in the Philippines.

I have been attending previous *Kwentong Kabaro* sessions that are equally engaging: discussions on the elections, on our territorial integrity, and on the women survivors of the drug war.

October's gathering, the eighth in an ongoing series, was of special significance for me. Joining the conversation were indefatigable frontliners—"heneralas" of the RH battle, as INCITEGov vice chair Maria Cleofe Gettie Sandoval called them.

They are Dr. Marilen Dañguilan and Dr. Junice Melgar.

IN OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH VERY YOUNG MOTHERS IN DISADVANTAGED CIRCUMSTANCES, WE KNOW THAT A CERTAIN TATAY HAS YET TO DO GOOD ON HIS PROMISE MADE THREE YEARS AGO. I WANT TO HOLD THIS TATAY TO HIS PROMISE.



Reproductive Health (RH) advocates Dr. Marilen Danguilan (**left**) and Dr. Junice Melgar (**below**) pointed out the problems that continue to hamper the effective implementation of RH Law in the country during their Kwentong Kabaro session.

Dr. Marilen

Dr. Marilen is a medical doctor, and she is directly involved in campaigns to reform crucial health-related policies like the Generics Law, PhilHealth, and Rooming-In and Breastfeeding Acts, among others.

She is also the author of three books on RH history in the Philippines, the latest, “The RH Bill Story: Contentions and Compromises,” was launched in 2018 and is an intimate account of the arduous process that led to the enactment of the RH Law.

The conversation with Dr. Marilen was brief, yet rich with insights. “Health system is not sexy, it’s so cranky. Nobody understands what health system is,” she said.

The system is already challenging to make sense of, even for those of us who have a slight advantage in knowledge and connection to power. It does not need much imagination to see how the most vulnerable stakeholders of health policy—women at the margins and their families—must totally be in the dark, as far as the mechanisms of the health system are concerned.

With the involvement of state- and non-

state actors alike, the continuity of the RH service universe can be problematic. Who does what, whose money goes where? Who may refuse potentially life-saving RH services, and who, by law, may not?

Dr. Marilen proposed that the problem is the absence of data that can best surface needs, for better matching with existing resources.

She insisted that health spending must be scrutinized diligently, sharing an instance where she examined the books of an institution and found that most of the money went to travel expenses. This financial misprioritization translates to lack of improvement in health outcomes.

Dr. Marilen mentioned that training, management, and actual services would be wiser investment of resources, which is why she honors the contribution of midwives.

Midwives

Accredited midwives, like the one from the Balabac story, typically make an unjust P10,000 paycheck. For Dr. Marilen, when it comes to obstetric care, midwives “form the backbone of the health system.”

While Dr. Marilen recognized the need for response to what is deemed a crisis of teenage pregnancy, she directed attention to other equally important facets of RH such as reproductive cancers, infertility, and intimate partner violence—DA or domestic abuse, as she referred to in her presentation.

Dr. Marilen concluded with a reiterated appeal for better data, specifically, on maternal mortality.

Dr. Junice

Dr. Junice mirrored Dr. Marilen’s frustration. Dr. Junice hit the ground running after graduation from medical school. She led community-based initiatives for decades starting with the partner communities of Likhaan Center for Women’s Health in Malabon.

Likhaan is a nongovernment and nonprofit women’s health clinic committed to the advancement of the health and rights of underserved women and their communities. Founded in 1995, its initiatives are in the areas of primary healthcare, maternal health, adolescent health, and universal access to safe and effective contraception.

Likhaan’s work is built on the contribution of mothers in the community. Like most RH organizations, initial engagement is with the women.

Organizing is right at the crux of Likhaan’s work, and Dr. Junice





RH advocates gathered outside the Supreme Court compound in Baguio City in April 2014 and called on the magistrates to uphold the constitutionality of the RH Law. Photo from the Facebook page of Likhaan Center for Women's Health.

highlighted the need to organize women based on practical needs. *"Gusto nila nang hindi sila masyadong nakabukaka, hindi 'yung parang every month bumabalik pa rin (What they want is to keep from spreading their legs all the time, to not have to go back for consultation every month),"* Dr. Junice said.

I agree with her emphasis on upholding the dignity of women who avail of health services. Organizations like Likhaan have proven to be a more humane alternative for women in poor communities who tend to endure indignities and inconveniences as they access reproductive healthcare.

The eventual shift to youth-focused programming is consistent with what is happening with the rest of the RH movement in the Philippines.

Likhaan's research on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) served as a template for the Department of Education (DepEd) as they developed standards for sexuality education for learners from Kinder to Grade 12 (K-12).

Dr. Junice shared her dismay with

cultural and attitudinal impediments to the delivery of quality CSE in the public school system. A DepEd official couldn't even say "menstruation" during one lecture. *"Ni hindi niya mabigkas-bigkas ang menstruation. Ang tawag niya sa menstruation ay expression ng frustration ng uterus (She can't even say 'menstruation.' She calls menstruation 'the expression of frustration of the uterus'),"* she said.

The purple bandana

Dr. Junice also shared the origins of the purple bandana, the "fashion piece" of choice among RH advocates. At the thick of the RH Law mobilizations, a 4,000-strong contingent of women and RH allies marched 4 kilometers from the Santo Domingo Church to Quezon City Hall.

During hearings at the House of Representatives, the purple bandana served a dual purpose: it was the marchers' protection from the heat and the elements while they waited outside for hours to be accommodated.

Inside, at the House of Representatives' plenary hall, women from the

communities would use the purple bandana as a shield against the cold. They were assigned seats in the uppermost rows, bearing the blast of the air conditioning. *"Ang lamig-lamig po niyan sa tuktok na 'yan (It was freezing cold at the very top),"* Dr. Junice said.

Involve partners

While women are at the forefront of the RH advocacy, Dr. Junice deemed it just as important to recruit the involvement of men and trans men, and even non-male partners. *"Mga asawa po natin o mga partner natin. 'Yung iba hindi men like butch and lesbians (Our husbands or our partners. Some are not men, like butch and lesbians)."*

Dr. Junice likewise recognized male RH champions: Ben De Leon, president of the Forum for Family Planning and Development (The Forum), and Mon San Pascual, former executive director of the Philippine Legislators' Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD).

Yet as an advocate and as a student of feminist development theories, I ponder how on the ground, the burden



WOMEN ARE THE FRONTLINERS IN THE FIGHT FOR UNIVERSAL RH RIGHTS, JUSTICE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

of caring for the health of families and communities is still disproportionately on women. Women are frontliners in the fight for universal RH rights, justice, and accountability. Is this an enslaving imposition, or an arena of power?

As it turned out, Dr. Junice had a parallel reflection. She recognized that you couldn't put women in one box, they would choose and decide based on their different persuasions.

On the RH issue, for example, on one end there are those who are against the law because they're Catholic.

On the other end are those who refuse to support the law because it doesn't provide for abortion. "Masyadong malabnaw, bakit hanggang contraception lang. Ba't walang abortion (The law is too watered down, why just contraception? Why is there no abortion)?" they would ask.

Still, there are other women's groups who would join their rally but would protest against population control. "Nabasa niyo ba ang RH Law? May part ba sa RH Law na pipilitin kang gumamit o pilitin kang hindi makagamit ng contraceptives, wag lang magpa-abort (Have you read the RH Law? Is there a part that would force you to use contraceptives, or not use them, just so you

can prevent abortion)?" she asked.

Dr. Junice again rallies the cause that women not be essentialized, that their choices be honored. This is the very same spirit of the RH Law's respect for, and accommodation of, the range of preferences when it comes to reproductive health.

The doctor also reported on familiar key RH indicators and how the Philippines continues to register disappointing figures like high cases of teenage pregnancy, maternal mortality, and gender-based violence.

There's also a "geometric" increase in HIV/AIDS, with the youth having the most cases of confirmed infections. The Philippines also registered the most number of deaths from unsafe abortions, the highest in Southeast Asia, despite being predominantly Catholic and despite abortion being totally banned in the country.

RH and *Tokhang*

It is clear that RH-related numbers are on an alarming trend, and the situation is aggravated, as vital work in communities is impeded due to the cloud of fear generated by Duterte's war on drugs.

Dr. Junice said because of the government's



On page 66: Photos of the attendees during the session's open forum

Left: Group photo with guest speakers, Dr. Marilen Danguilan and Dr. Junice Melgar

Tokhang operations, they had to remind their organizers to bring identification cards to prove they are health workers. They also tell them that they should be out of the community by 5 p.m. and to always bring companions because it is dangerous.

Women volunteers now patrol even middle class communities, something they didn't have to do in the past. "Now, they do it because the people are terrified. A lot of women are awake at night, they are very watchful. They sleep during the day," she said.

Hearing this made me realize that the women who take care of their communities are overexerted. Having to do the rounds at night, and, their energy and emotional resources allowing, having to do community care work during the day, could compromise performance in one or both duties. All of these, on top of their responsibilities in their respective homes.

Severe cancer

Responding to a question during the open forum, Dr. Junice emphasized how reproductive health is a right guaranteed under the law, and how ultimately, accountability goes back to

the chief executive.

On the ailing national system, Dr. Junice said: "*Dinadaan ko lang sa tawa ito pero may malubhang cancer po. Dapat idinudulog 'yan sa presidente kasi parang failure ng health system 'yan.* (I just laugh it off, but there is severe cancer. It must be brought before the president, because it is a failure of the health system)."

We have a president who enjoys tremendous popularity that cuts across demographics. With all his powers and political resources, Duterte can make things happen for the RH Law. Why we have yet to see the most meaningful implementation of the RH Law under an administration that has been wildly creative in executing its will is anyone's guess.

For me, how Tala from Balabac, Palawan, goes through life is a most potent indicator of how the RH Law fulfills or in her case, doesn't fulfill, its mandate of universal access to the continuum of services that are requisite to the highest level of reproductive health.

Tala is at the intersection of intersections: female, poor, geographically-isolated,

and of an indigenous identity. Also, she is, herself, a child.

I dream of an alternative reality for Tala. One where she receives comprehensive sexuality education as she enters her reproductive years. One where even on the island, she always has access to competent and compassionate reproductive health care. One where a hormonal implant that can give her tender body a three-year reprieve from childbearing, is not kept from her by way of a Supreme Court order.

The RH Law has failed Tala and many like her.

A body is only as healthy as its most vulnerable, fragile parts. The state of reproductive health law in the Philippines is reflected by the lived realities of those on the margins.

If the RH Law works to empower Tala to have "freedom of informed choice" over her body and her life, with institutions supporting her as she and her children become "productive members of the labor force" as Duterte's pronouncement echoes, we can be assured that RH Law can work for all of us.



A mural on the drug war painted in Quezon City by the street art collective Gerilya and local residents./ Photo from PCIJ.

TELLING THE STORY OF THE WAR ON THE POOR

BY PAULINE FERNANDEZ

The image has become all too familiar: a woman clutches a lifeless body as she cries in anguish. A cardboard next to them reads, “Drug pusher. Don’t emulate.”

The body could be her son’s. Or her husband’s. There has been a parade of bodies over three years, since President Rodrigo Duterte set his drug war in motion.

“

Is anyone listing these names down?”

“Is anyone listing these names down?” Maria Karla Abigail Pangilinan asked when the body count began.

Her question would lead to an important research that would confirm what most of us suspected all along: the government’s war on drugs is—to its

very core—a war on the poor.

In November’s *Kwentong Kabaro*, a group of young people, brought together by their shared anguish, talked about how they used research and the arts to take a stand against the injustices of this war.

Contrasting government policies

Pangilinan was working at the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)* of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) when *Oplan Tokhang* was first implemented in 2016.



Development advocates (**left to right**) Mixkaela Villalon, Maria Karla Abigail Pangilinan, and Maria Carmen Fernandez discussed the results of their study on the impact of Oplan Tokhang on conditional cash transfer beneficiaries, and how they communicated their findings through art.

4Ps is the Philippines’ conditional cash transfer program piloted in 2006 by the DSWD. Its goal is to provide assistance to lower income families and break the poverty cycle.

Oplan Tokhang is a police operation launched by the Duterte administration that involves officers visiting houses of suspects involved in drug-related crimes. Tokhang is derived from the words *toktok* (knock) and *hangyo* (plead).

Pangilinan said she started to receive calls from 4Ps families affected by drug-related killings, most of them from mothers she had directly worked with. The mothers were scared that their children’s names and faces had turned into mere items to be crossed out on police operation scoresheet.

“That was the trigger,” Pangilinan said. “If no one is recording their names, we have to start. This list will be important, perhaps not at that very moment, but in the future.”

Together with fellow development researchers Maria Carmen Fernandez and Nastassja Quijano, she documented

the real-life stories behind the growing figures.



WHICH SHOULD BE PRIORITIZED? THE WAR ON DRUGS OR ANTI-POVERTY EFFORTS?

Unfortunately, more often, anti-poverty issues are only secondary.

“We think that if you want to say that this is a war on the poor, then go to the poorest of the poor in the country,” Pangilinan said.

The trio examined the effects of anti-illegal drug operations on poor families in Metro Manila from April 2016 to December 2017.

Their findings revealed that at least 1 in 5 victims of drug-related killings in Metro Manila was a 4Ps beneficiary. They also documented at least 12 cases of multiple deaths within the same family.

The study showed how *Oplan Tokhang* derails the successes of 4Ps. While billions of pesos are being poured into 4Ps, a number of its beneficiaries are being killed.

It further revealed that most *Tokhang* victims were breadwinners, which consequently led to a decrease in household income. “The reduced available income, as well as the social stigma of having a drug-related death in the family, causes children covered by the CCT to drop out of school,” the study said.

“This study looks at two clashing policies. Which should be prioritized? The war on drugs or anti-poverty efforts?” Fernandez asked during the forum.

“Unfortunately, more often, anti-poverty issues are only secondary,” she answered.

The women left behind

Their research also found that the women widowed, orphaned, or whose children got killed are the ones who have to bear the brunt of *Oplan Tokhang*.

“The victims are usually males and are the breadwinners of the family. Once killed, it’s usually women who are left behind and are forced to take care of their families,” Fernandez said.

“Especially in poor families, the burden usually falls on the wife, or on the eldest daughter, or mothers who are already of old age,” Pangillinan added.

The gender impact of these operations is felt heavily by the poor. Widows with no educational attainment or employable skills opt to run away with new partners.

In many cases, it’s the grandmothers who have no other choice but to care for the orphaned. This further exposes the already marginalized sectors to multiple vulnerabilities.

This can be seen in the interviews conducted by the researchers.

One case is Dina, 61, who suffered from depression after both her husband and son were killed in separate drug-related killings. Despite her illnesses, “she works as a laundry woman so that she can provide for her grandchildren and children.”

Another is Ditas, 85, who “can no longer work and has resorted to begging on the streets so that she and her grandchild will have money to buy food and pay for basic services.”

Trisha, 34, is a mother of five and “said she cannot afford to send all her children to school or feed them all.”

“

WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS TO USE FORMS AND LANGUAGES THAT THE AUDIENCE CAN UNDERSTAND.

This is our way of taking the stories of the communities, and bringing them back to the communities themselves.

The role of art

When the study was done, the group submitted it to policy makers, the academe, and the media. But Pangilinan and Fernandez found themselves asking, “What now?”

They wanted to present their paper to the communities that provided the figures but they knew that it would take more than just scribbles on pages to catch their attention.

The researchers wanted to make the communities listen to their own stories.

Pangilinan and Fernandez sought the help of writer Mixkaela Villalon and rapper Jayme Ancla, more popularly known as Calix.

Their collaboration gave birth to a rap album, what they called their “passion project.” Together with other artists and musicians, the group produced KOLATERAL, a compilation of 12 tracks narrating the real stories of the families affected by the war on drugs.

“What’s important is to use forms and languages that the audience can understand,” Villalon said, highlighting the need to update the ways of communicating information through the arts.

“This is our way of taking the stories of the communities and bringing them back to the communities themselves,” Villalon added.

The group used art as a tool to present data to a wider audience in a way that is creative and interesting.

Villalon pointed out that sifting through research is boring, however important the findings may be.

But when rap songs are played in the communities, the youth get it right away. “This is their form of communication and we have to use it for them to understand us,” Villalon explained.

“*Makinarya*,” “*Hawak*,” and “*Walang Maiiwan*” are songs from the album.

In “*Makinarya*,” a father speaks to his children, reassuring them that as long as they obey his commands, they are absolved of responsibility for the bloodshed they cause.

*Aking mga anak, ipalaganap niyo ang utos ko
‘Wag kayo matakot na malunod sa dugo
Ang aking salita ang siyang magiging armas
Sa aking salita, walang makakaligtas*





Left: The album cover of KOLATERAL/ Photo from Kolateral's Facebook page
Right: The guest speakers and attendees of the session



(My children, proclaim my commands
 Fear not to drown in blood
 My word is the weapon
 In my word, no one is safe)

“Hawak” starts out as an innocent love song but would later reveal that the lovers were both victims in successive drug-related killings. Villalon said that the song was based on media reports of a real couple that had been killed.

*Ang buhay ba namin barya para sa katulad nila
 Walang laman-tiyan pero katawan nami’y punong-puno ng tingga
 Karahasan ba ang sagot? Karapatan ba ay limot?*

(Are our lives worth nothing to them
 Our stomachs are empty yet our bodies are filled with lead
 Is violence the answer? Has justice been forgotten?)

“Walang Maiiwan,” where the album got its name, is a call to action and an expression of rage. “No one gets left behind, no one is a collateral casualty.”

*Wag maliitin ang tapang ng maralita
 (Oras nang lumaban)
 Pabagsakin ang halang na hari ng sistema
 Paigtingin ang paglaban sa kasakiman
 (Oras nang lumaban)
 Walang maiiwan, walang kolateral*

(Don’t belittle the courage of the poor
 [It’s time to fight]
 Knock down the class that rules the system
 Strengthen the fight against greed
 [It’s time to fight]
 No one will be left behind, there will be no collateral damage)

KWENTUHANG KABARO

On alternative forms of justice

Many *kabaros* saw the importance of seeking alternative forms of justice both for the victims and for those they left behind.

One step that can be made moving forward is to think about “reparations and transitional justice,” said Beth Yang of PILIPINA. She explained the current legal system does not work in favor of the families of victims and getting the justice they need.

Fernandez also mentioned the need to go back to the communities and consider what forms of justice are being sought within. “Apart from legal means, what are the processes that will give them comfort and assurance?” she asked.

The silver lining seen by one *kabaro* is that the widows of the victims are now empowered. “They have the awareness and they want to keep fighting. It’s good that they recognize the power that’s in their hands,” she said.

On engaging and story-telling

Another point of discussion focused on how to engage those who are not directly affected by the killings.

Shebana Alqaseer of EveryWoman shared that those in middle-class communities don’t act unless the issue directly concerns them. “They aren’t affected or scared, nor are they willing

to help victims because they can’t relate to it. They will only feel fear and concern if it happens to someone they already know,” she said.

In response, Jurgette Honculada of PILIPINA mentioned that the media and the academe are resources that can be tapped to tell the truth.

On coming together

International Center for Innovation, Transformation and Excellence in Governance (INCITEGov) chair Teresita Quintos Deles said that the approach used by the presenters gave the discussion on extrajudicial killings (EJKs) a different look and understanding.

She said that the discourse on EJKs has been going on for a long time. “However, this project allows us to look at the forms of presenting data and stories differently, and how to utilize our cultural tools to best relay information.”

Calix also pointed out the importance of working together regardless of what our skill sets are. “This unique collaboration that puts art and data together brings out the strengths each of us have,” he said.

“We have different backgrounds, different politics. But in times like today, we have to close ranks and help each other,” Pangilinan added.

KABAROS MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

BY PAULINE FERNANDEZ

Kwentong Kabaro has become a safe space for women. After nine sessions that started in March 2019, unity among sisters was forged amid stories of milestone wins and major pitfalls for the women's movement.

December 14's culminating session for 2019 highlighted the continuing need for women to come together and discuss timely issues that affect the sector. The fire to further strengthen sisterhood and enrich the feminist fervor is very much alive and is burning even brighter.

In the inaugural conversation in March entitled "Beijing on My Mind," Patricia Licuanan shared her experience as the main committee chair in the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.

Licuanan helped draft The Beijing Declaration Platform for Action, a global consensus on the advancement of women's rights.

In April, Teresita Quintos Deles discussed the manifestations of populism in the country and its impact on women and gender equality.

In May, Dr. Socorro Reyes talked about the women's vote and its impact on the 2019 national midterm elections.

In June, the late Karina Constantino David discussed her perspective on feminism and women's organizing through a

taped video interview.

In July, lawyer Abigail Valte shared her experiences as one of only two female delegates in the historic Hague ruling on the West Philippine Sea.

In August, Senator Ana Theresia Hontiveros-Baraquel presented the successes of the milestone laws that cater to women's issues, with special focus on the Safe Spaces Act of 2019.

September saw Mayor Sitti Djalja Turabin-Hataman sharing her experiences as a woman leader in the Bangsamoro.

In October, medical doctors Junice Melgar and Marilen Dañguilan talked about the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law and the continuing fight for women's reproductive rights.

In November, Maria Karla Abigail Pangilinan, Maria Carmen Fernandez, and Mixkaela Villalon discussed their research on the effects of the drug war on conditional cash transfer beneficiaries. They also presented creative methods of sharing information.



*The fire to further
strengthen sisterhood
and enrich the feminist
fervor is very much
alive and is burning
even brighter.*





From left to right: Shebana Alqaseer (EveryWoman), Gay Benueza (Social Democratic Caucus), Natividad Pilipina (NTHKC), Joanna Caumeran (Grrrl Gang Manila), and Herminia Tenorio (Likhaan Center for Women's Health) talked about the possible next steps for *Kwentong Kabaro*.

WE HAVE TO GO BACK TO THE BASICS OF GENDER AND ORGANIZING. SPACES PURELY FOR THE DISCUSSION OF GENDER ARE SCARCE, AND KWENTONG KABARO FILLS THAT GAP.

EveryWoman's Shebana Alqaseer led the discussion that assessed the value of *Kwentong Kabaro* to its participants and the next steps to be taken as a community.

The panel included:

Natividad Pilipina of Nagkakaisang Tinig at Hakbang ng Kababaihan sa Caloocan (NTHKC), a group of community women from Caloocan fighting for women's and human rights;

Herminia Tenorio of Likhaan Center for Women's Health, a nongovernment and nonprofit women's health clinic;

Joanna Caumeran of Grrrl Gang Manila, a feminist group that aims to open the dialogue for feminism and women's issues, and;

Gay Benueza of Social Democratic Caucus (SDC), an organization of individuals who adhere to the theories and practices of social democracy and democratic socialism.

On Christmas wishes for the coming holidays

Pilipina: I wish for genuine social and cultural change. Especially in today's political climate where it's hard to position ourselves.

Tenorio: The women's sector has won so many battles. It may seem like these are slowly withering away but the pushback from women remains strong. My wish for the following years is that more of us come together to fight for social justice and equality.

Caumeran: I hope the community we established this year becomes stronger and that we push for justice for those affected by the administration's policies.

On the importance of Kwentong Kabaro

Pilipina: Even though women have yet to achieve genuine freedom, these sessions give us strength. This allows us to get out of the well we've been stuck in. And those who climb out, however few, can spread the word that there is so much more to being a woman.

The lessons learned in *Kwentong Kabaro* can be brought down to impact the community. This teaches us how to raise women's consciousness and self-confidence, and how to get involved in political and social work.

Tenorio: *Kwentong Kabaro* is like a clearing house. We are given the opportunity to discuss current political issues for those who otherwise don't have the time to sit down and study. This is an important venue to hear other women from different sectors' perspectives and experiences. This is what lays the groundwork for sisterhood, unity, and solidarity among women. As we are exposed to different issues, it's important that we approach them from perspectives other than our own.

Caumeran: *Kwentong Kabaro* heightened how I look at social issues. I have a different lens now. It's now part of every minute and every second of my decision-making. It's a work in progress and there's so much more to improve. The small community that we've built has become so intimate and is a space where we can come together freely.

Benueza: Back in 1987, we made materials on gender. There wasn't anything of the sort then. We had to translate or create new materials for the people we were organizing. This is the start of teaching gender in the Philippines. We have to go back to the basics of gender and organizing. Spaces purely for the discussion of gender are scarce, and *Kwentong Kabaro* fills that gap.

On the most memorable Kwentong Kabaro conversation

Pilipina: "*Kabaro sa Kapayapaan*" with Mayor Djalia Hataman. One thing that struck me was when she said that if there's something she should return to, it's the relationship she has with the communities. And this is the same dream that I have.

Tenorio: My favorites were "Beijing on My Mind" and "*Kabaro sa Kapayapaan*." But I regret not having gone to "Effects of *Tokhang* on 4Ps" because it's on issues experienced widely.

Caumeran: The last one, "Effects of *Tokhang* on 4Ps." That's where I realized we should utilize different forms of presenting our research if we want to appeal to different audiences.

Benueza: The one with Mayor Hataman. She talked about so many aspects of a woman struggling for power.

On suggested topics for next year

Pilipina: Basic organizing in the community, focusing on grassroots is important.

Tenorio: The Bangsamoro experience, media and threats to democratic institutions, a closer look at Universal Health Care, or whatever feminine hot issue comes up next year.

Caumeran: We haven't talked about women from indigenous peoples' groups. Maybe we can invite someone over. They definitely have a different struggle.

**THE WOMEN'S
SECTOR HAS WON
SO MANY BATTLES.
IT MAY SEEM LIKE
THESE ARE SLOWLY
WITHERING AWAY,
BUT THE PUSHBACK
FROM WOMEN
REMAINS STRONG.**



Photos of the session's attendees



Benueza: We should talk about the legislative agenda. Especially how this cascades down to the constituents. We don't know what's happening in Congress, so it would be good to regularly include this in our conversations.

Health issues such as the following are given great interest: addressing and raising awareness for teenage pregnancy, providing healthcare for poor families that can't afford these services, and caring for oneself in the face of misogyny. Health in connection to issues specific to aging women is also one concern, as well as other topics related to aging, like financial challenges.

There was also a suggestion to sharpen the understanding of feminist theory and to use this as foundation to grow the existing network of women's groups. Relevant topics include feminism for the women in the streets and how to spread feminism to those who have no access to resources; and awareness-building on the women's issues behind charter change, 4Ps policies, environmental concerns, and threats to media and other democratic institutions.

On improving Kwentong Kabaro

Pilipina: We have to be strategic and creative. Documentation from each conversation can be taken to communities.

Tenorio: More time for interaction to encourage exchange of ideas. We can create short videos or creative reports that can be taken to communities.

Caumeran: We can use a different method for us to have a conversation like watching a short film and inviting the director. This has more appeal to younger audiences. We can even take these to schools and expand the community.

Benueza: The typical classroom-type venue is better for interaction.

Having a lecture-type format is informative but it would be better if more people get to participate and interact with each other. The monthly conversations can function as regular catch-up sessions for those in the community. To facilitate this, a lighter and more conversational tone can be adapted. Updates on the latest news and social issues could also be included to start off each session.

The conversations should be transcribed and made into hard copies that can be distributed as materials to be used to organize communities. A *Bantay Democracy* movement could also be formed.

In her closing statement, International Center for Innovation, Transformation and Excellence in Governance (INCITEGov) chair Teresita Quintos Deles affirmed that there is a space the *Kwentong Kabaro* fills as we hold discussions centered on issues of democracy.

"This sends a message that we shouldn't lose hope. That as long as we do what we need to do, we will be triumphant."



Kwentong Kabaro has convened 204 participants from 54 different organizations in previous conversations. Organizations that have been constantly present and have shown support are, among others:

- Akap Pamilya
- Akbayan Women
- Al-Mujadilah Development Foundation (AMDF)
- Alliance of Women Advancing Reform (AWARE)
- Baigani
- Camarin
- EveryWoman
- Grrrl Gang Manila
- Harnessing Self-Reliant Initiatives and Knowledge (HASIK)
- Institute of Philippine Culture-Ateneo
- Pinagsamang Lakas ng Kababaihan, Kabataan at ibang Kasarian (PilaKKK)
- Kamalayan
- Likhaan Center for Women's Health
- Metro United Livelihood Initiatives (MULI)
- Nagkakaisang Tinig at Hakbang ng Kababaihan sa Caloocan (NTHKC)
- Pandayan Women
- People's Alternative Study for Research and Education in Social Development (PASCRES)
- People Power Volunteers for Reform (PPVR)
- PILIPINA
- Pinagsamang Lakas ng Kababaihan
- PINASAMA
- Samahan ng mga Pilipina para sa Reporma at Kaunlaran (SPARK)
- Social Democratic Caucus (SDC)
- Students from Ateneo de Manila University
- Students from the Philippine Normal University
- Students from the University of the Philippines College of Social Welfare and Community Development (CSWCD)
- Students from the University of Santo Tomas
- The Asia Foundation
- The Silent Majority
- Women with Disability taking Action on Reproductive and Sexual Health (W-Dare)
- Young Pinay

**AS LONG AS WE
DO WHAT WE
NEED TO DO,
WE WILL BE
TRIUMPHANT.**

WHAT'S NEXT

INCITEGov

Kwentong Kabaro

*Paningin at Pagtingin:
Kababaihan sa Lente ng Media*

with Ms. Olive Tripon
and Ms. Lisa Garcia

January 25, 2020 | 9am
Book and Borders Cafe
General Malvar St. Cubao, Quezon City

INCITEGov

Kwentong Kabaro

*Filipino Families Today:
Changing Realities, Shifting Paradigms*

with Dr. Mary Racelis
and Dr. Marita Castro Guevara

February 15, 2020 | 9AM
Conference Room, 3rd Floor
Cyberpark Tower 1, General Aguinaldo,
Cubao, Quezon City

Kwentong Kabaro takes a new form this 2020!

Starting January 2020, each monthly **Kwentong Kabaro** will aim to examine how major institutions such as the media, family, Church, and the government, affect the way women look at themselves and the world, and vice versa. Moreover, each session will also start with a quick recap of the national events that took place in the past month.

“Dahil patindi ng patindi ang mga challenges sa democracy at kababaihan, naisip namin na maging mas purposive at mas may direksyon yung mga pag-uusap (Because the challenges to democracy and women are getting stronger, we thought that each conversation should be more purposive and be aimed at a more precise direction),” INCITEGov chair Teresita Quintos Deles said while emphasizing the need to create an agenda that will deepen everyone’s understanding of the current political landscape.

She also mentioned that each conversation will strive to reach a wider audience by going to communities. “Ang gusto natin talaga ay mapalawak ito (We really want to widen the reach of each conversation),” Deles said.



THE WOMEN

