



A visual summary of online discussions for  
the Women and Girls at the Center of COVID-19  
Prevention Programme in the Philippines

# WOMEN RISE ABOVE COVID



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the Philippines, UN Women implemented the Government of Japan-funded “Women and Girls at the Center of COVID-19 Prevention” programme which aimed to increase women’s capacities, resources and skills to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in communities at risk, allow women’s groups and networks to influence and contribute to gender-responsive policies on COVID-19, and leverage national and regional platforms to advance research and tools to inform inclusive and gender-responsive national and regional measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 for socio-economic responses. Prior to the culmination of the project in May 2021, UN Women hosted a series of online discussions to discuss continuing gaps and challenges experienced by women and girls in the Philippines’ COVID-19 response, to determine ways forward in terms of policy and advocacy and women and girls’ continued access to information, and to identify relevant collaborations with other stakeholders as UN Women continues its work during the pandemic. This report summarizes the four sessions organized by UN Women from April to May 2021.

UN Women is sincerely grateful to Pushpin Visual Solutions for this creative summary of the online discussions, and Tofu Creatives for providing graphic recordings of each session. We are also grateful for the team behind the successful online discussions, namely:

1. Ms. Rasheede Caritativo, COVID-19 Communications and Advocacy Consultant of UN Women;
2. Atty. Patricia Miranda, Policy Consultant;
3. Ms. Ana Margarita Vineles, Programme Support Consultant;
4. Ms. Maricel Aguilar, who facilitated our online discussions;
5. Mr. Alfredo Raymond Mahinan III and Mr. Bayani Generoso Jr., who provided Filipino Sign Language interpretation for the events; and
6. Ms. Camille Adle, Programme Analyst, COVID-19 Prevention and Humanitarian Action.

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# SPEAKERS

## Measuring Women's Leadership and Meaningful Participation in COVID-19 Responses



### Maya Tamayo

Maya Tamayo is a passionate advocate for women's rights and the arts. Much of her career has revolved around forwarding gender in governance, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and women's political participation through feminist research and program development. Currently, she is the co-founder and program manager of the Angat Bayi, a women's political empowerment program under the University of the Philippines Center for Women's and Gender Studies.



### Pip Henty

Pip Henty specialises in gender and inclusion in humanitarian practice. Over the past eight years, Pip has worked in operational and technical roles in the not-for-profit and private sectors, including in the areas of international development and humanitarian action. Pip provides research, technical and policy advice across Humanitarian Advisory Group's portfolio of work.

# SPEAKERS

Leaving No Woman Behind During the COVID-19 Pandemic – Putting the Spotlight on Women in Detention, Indigenous Women, Women Displaced by Conflict, Women Refugees, Stateless, Asylum-Seeking Women, and Women living with HIV/AIDS



## Atty. Mary Catherine “Cathy” Alvarez

**Executive Director**  
**StreetLawPH**

Cathy Alvarez is a human rights lawyer working on access to justice for vulnerable sectors and law reform for humane drug policies in the Philippines. She is the executive director and one of the founders of StreetLawPh, a legal service NGO working on drug policy reform in the Philippines. They provide paralegal skills training for persons deprived of liberty inside different jails in Metro Cebu as part of their work for criminal justice reform and access to justice.



## Maya Quirino

**Advocacy Coordinator**  
**Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center (LRC)**

Maya Quirino is the advocacy coordinator of the Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center, a non-profit organization that provides legal services to and advocates for the rights of Indigenous peoples. Maya is concurrent coordinator of the SOS *Yamang Bayan* Network (SOS National Resources Network), a multi-sectoral alliance of Indigenous peoples, NGOs, youth, and artists pushing for a new law that will enforce stronger environmental and social safeguards against large-scale metallic mining.



## Kat Magtoto

**Project Coordinator**  
**Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights (Lilak)**

Kat Magtoto is the Project Coordinator of LILAK. She is also a feminist and activist.



## Josephine “Joy” Lascano

**Executive Director**  
**Balay Rehabilitation Center**

Joy Lascano is the current Executive Director of Balay Rehabilitation Center and an elected Basic Sector Council Member of the National Anti Poverty Commission Victims of Disasters and Calamities. She is also a member of the Interim National Preventive Mechanism against Torture of the Commission on Human Rights and an Advisory Council Member of the United against Inhumanity a international group based in UK.

# SPEAKERS

Leaving No Woman Behind During the COVID-19 Pandemic – Putting the Spotlight on Women in Detention, Indigenous Women, Women Displaced by Conflict, Women Refugees, Stateless, Asylum-Seeking Women, and Women living with HIV/AIDS



## Maria Louella "Lui" Gamboa

**Protection Associate**  
**UNHCR**

Maria Louella "Lui" Gamboa has been in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as a Protection Associate for more than 7 years. She supervises the Protection Unit in setting strategic directions, the application of international protection standards in interventions, and timely and effective responses to the needs of persons of concern. She is also involved in legal and policy review and manages and develops partnerships for UNHCR to ensure the inclusion of persons of concern in services, programmes, and supply chains.



## Aerial Ann Gonzales

**Protection Associate**  
**UNHCR**

Aerial Ann Gonzales is also a Protection Associate at UNHCR for over two years now. She is primarily responsible for coordinating policy and advocacy efforts in support of the objectives of UNHCR in resolving statelessness in the Philippines.



## Dr. Louie Ocampo

**Country Director**  
**UNAIDS**

Dr. Louie Ocampo is a Doctor of Medicine and specialized in Family and Community Medicine and holds Master's Degrees in Public Health and Management in Hospital Administration and has a wealth of experience working in public health services as well as in the hospital setting. He is a passionate HIV advocate and is the Country Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

# SPEAKERS

## Leaving No Woman Behind During the COVID-19 Pandemic – Putting the Spotlight on Women with Disabilities



**Edward Ello**

**Humanity & Inclusion**

Edward has been in the development programming and inclusive humanitarian intervention for more than 22 years. He finished special needs education at international open academy, project management & organization development at DLSU CSB and business management at St Joseph College in QC. Edward's areas of specialization are community-based rehabilitation, inclusive governance, training/capacity building and inclusion. Edward is also the coordinator of Aging and Disability Taskforce (ADTF), a member of Child Rights, National Child protection working group and Networked Learning PH (online educators). Edward is also the cohort at Jessie Robredo Institute for Leadership and good governance on Adaptive Leadership. Edward is the current Acting Country Director at Humanity & Inclusion for the Philippines and Indonesia. He is also the HI PIN Disability, Gender and Age specialist.



**Agatha Joy Hega-Lacambra**

**Board Member**

**Philippine Federation of the Deaf (Mindanao)**

Agatha Joy Hega-Lacambra is from Davao City and is a board member of the Philippines' Federation of the Deaf in South Mindanao. She is also the Vice President of the Davao Region Association of the Deaf, Inc.



**Amie Dava**

**Persons with Disabilities Affairs Officer**

**Municipality of San Buenavista Antique**

Amie Dava is the Persons with Disabilities Affairs Officer at Local Government Unit of San Jose de Buenavista Antique. She also serves as WOW-LEAP Coordinator for Region 6, President of Rotaract Club of Antique, and a Member of the Provincial Council Technical Working Group on Disability in Antique. She has an orthopedic disability due to Polio.

# SPEAKERS

## Leaving No Woman Behind During the COVID-19 Pandemic – Putting the Spotlight on Women with Disabilities



### Deborah “Debbie” Panela

**Community Manager  
Virtualahan**

Debbie Panela is a registered Medical Technologist by profession and is a socio-civic Volunteer for organizations that cater the needs of PWDs for 10 years. She is also a member and former secretary of the Federation of Persons with Disability Associations of Iloilo City. She is also currently a Board of Director for Professional Development in Rotaract Club of Iloilo City and serves as Community Manager in Virtualahan Inc.



### Maria Fe Maravillas

**President  
Federation of Persons with Disability (NCR)**

Maria Fe Maravillas is the current President of the Federation of Persons with Disability for the National Capital Region. She is also the current President of the Las Pinas Persons with Disability Federation Inc. She worked as Project Manager for the Community-Based Enrichment Program for Children with Disabilities in partnership with ASMAE, and is a continuing Partner Associate of Community Programs on Social Concerns and Actions at the DLSU COSCA.



### Leonor “Aya” Tiongco-Sunit

**Coordinator  
W-DARE**

Aya Tiongco-Sunit is the Vice President of the Nationwide Organization of Visually Impaired Empowered Ladies Inc. (NOVEL). She is also the Group Coordinator of Women with Disability taking Action on REproductive and Sexual Health (WDARE). She has visual impairment due to retinitis pigmentosa.



# SPEAKERS

## Leaving No Woman Behind During the COVID-19 Pandemic – Putting the Spotlight on Women with Disabilities



### Shiela May Aggarao

**Secretary**  
**NOVEL**

Shiela May Aggarao is presently a member of *Bantay Karapatan ng mga Kababaihang May Kapansanan* (BKKK) or Protector of Rights of Women with Disabilities, a project in partnership with Commission on Human Rights Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights Center (CHR GEWHRC). She is also a Core Group Member of Inklusyon - A weekly online program about persons with disabilities, the Philippine Alliance of Women with Disabilities (PAWID), and Philippine Coalition on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She also currently serves as Secretary of the Nationwide Organization of Visually-Impaired Empowered Ladies (NOVEL) and Vision – Impaired and Striving Individuals Optimizing Normalcy Aiming for Resiliency Independence, Empowerment and Spirituality (VISIONARIES).



### Corazon “Cora” Clarin

**President**  
**WOW-LEAP Region 7**

Cora Clarin is the OIC of the Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office in the LGU of Cordova, Cebu. She is also the President of WOWLEAP Cebu Chapter (Women with Disability Leap for Economic and Social Progress). She also serves as the Convener for the Cebu Disability-Inclusive DRR Network (CDiDRRN) and Vice President of the League of Person with Disability Affairs Office in the Philippines (LPDAOP).



### Gina Rose Balanlay

**Founding Member & Treasurer**  
**NOVEL**

Gina Rose Balanlay is a founding member and treasurer of the Nationwide Organization of Visually Impaired Empowered (NOVEL). She is also a founding member of the Philippine Alliance of Women with Disabilities (PaWiD); a member of Philippine Coalition on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and a volunteer member of *Bantay Karapatan ng mga Kababaihang May Kapansanan* (BKKK) or Protector of Rights of Women with Disabilities of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and Gender Equality Women's Human Rights Center (GEWHRC).

# SPEAKERS

## Leaving No Woman Behind During the COVID-19 Pandemic – Putting the Spotlight on Women with Disabilities



### Atty. Kristine Rosary E. Yuzon-Chaves

**Executive Director**

**Philippine Commission on Women**

Atty. Kristine Rosary E. Yuzon-Chaves is a mother, a lawyer, a business professional, and a women's rights advocate. ED Krey, as she is called by many, hails from Cagayan de Oro City where she finished her law studies and started her path in the legal profession. Her passion to advance women's rights is intertwined with her work as a lawyer. From her time as an Associate Attorney and a partner at the Torrefranca-Yuzon Law, she handled pro bono cases on Violence Against Women and Children. She also advocated for the gender-sensitive policies, women entrepreneurship, and protection of women against sexual harassment in the workplace, and many others. When she is not drafting pleadings or giving legal advice, she is busy running or managing different businesses, her own and her family's, including Cenyu Whole Foods in Cagayan de Oro City.



### Engr. Emerito Rojas

**Executive Director**

**National Council of Disability Affairs**

Engr. Emerito Rojas is the Executive Director of the National Council of Disability Affairs. He provides overall direction, supervision and coordination of government policies, programs, and projects relative to disability awareness and promotion. He has been an active advocate of persons with disabilities together with his wife. Prior to NCDA, he served as President at the New Vois Association of the Philippines (NVAP), a non-profit, non-government organization that advocates cancer support and awareness, tobacco control, road safety, and persons with disability welfare. He also once hosted a radio show which was broadcasted over the government's FM radio station DWBR. Engr. Rojas is also a graduate of the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

# SPEAKERS

## Usapang Bakuna: A Dialogue with Women on COVID-19 Vaccines and the Government's National Vaccination Deployment Plan



### Dr. Nina Gloriani

**Chairperson**

**DOST Expert Vaccine Panel on COVID-19 Vaccine Clinical Trials**

Dr. Nina Gloriani currently serves as the Chairperson of the DOST Expert Vaccine Panel on COVID-19 Vaccine Clinical Trials, and is also a Member of the WHO Scientific Steering Committee for COVID-19 Solidarity Vaccines Trial. She continues to chair the National Certification Committee for Poliomyelitis Eradication in the Philippines.



### Dr. Beverly Ho

**Director**

**Health Promotion Bureau and Disease Prevention and Control Bureau**

Beverly Lorraine Ho is the concurrent Director for Health Promotion Bureau and Disease Prevention and Control Bureau Special Assistant to the Secretary of Health for Universal Health Coverage at the Department of Health - Philippines. Immediately prior, she was Chief of Research Division of the Health Policy Development and Planning Bureau where she worked to provide the evidence needed to support health system reform by designing innovative research grants and building institutional capacity for policy research.



### Dr. Kezia Rosario

**Secretariat**

**National Vaccination Operations Center (DOH)**

Dr. KZ was previously a Doctor to the Barrio and is currently serving as Secretariat of the National Vaccination Operations Center of the Department of Health.



### Dr. Mark Benjamin Quiazon

**Health Officer**

**UNICEF Philippines**

Dr. Macky Quiazon is currently serving as Health Officer at UNICEF Philippines. He has previously held positions within the World Health Organization, Kalusugan ng Mag-ina Inc. and the Philippine General Hospital. He has an MSc on Global Health Science and Epidemiology from the University of Oxford and is a pediatrician.

# SPEAKERS

## Usapang Bakuna: A Dialogue with Women on COVID-19 Vaccines and the Government's National Vaccination Deployment Plan



### Margot B. Torres

**Managing Director**

**Golden Arches Development Corporation (McDonald's Philippines)**

Margot has over thirty years of marketing, communications and management experience under her belt. She has been with McDonald's Philippines for 17 years and is currently the Managing Director of its 655 strong store network. She is also Vice President for Ronald McDonald House Charities whose advocacy is children's well-being with an emphasis on education through its Read To Learn beginning reading program with DepEd that has helped over 12 million children in 10,774 public schools and its Bahay Bulilit learning centers operating in 34 cities together with the LGU and DSWD. During the pandemic, RMHC's McDonald's Kindness Kitchen served over 370,000 meals to front liners and marginalized communities.



# 01

## MEASURING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP & MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN COVID-19 RESPONSES

You may watch the videos under the #WomenRiseAboveCOVID Playlist at UN Women's YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/unwomen>.

April 20, 2021

**“I don't think anyone expects the government to know everything, but that's precisely why women's rights organizations exist, precisely why all these development organizations and humanitarian sectors, why we all exist — because we recognize one centralized power can't accommodate all of our needs.”**

Sabrina Gacad, Lunas Collective

#WomenRiseAboveCOVID Online Discussion Series aims to raise awareness on the gaps and challenges related to COVID-19 faced by women and girls in the Philippines, assess their level of access to correct and adequate COVID-19 information, facilitate collaboration and partnerships with government and non-government agencies, and support policy recommendations for gender-responsive COVID-19 legislation.

The series officially kicked off on April 20, 2021. Macel Aguilar moderated the first installment, a Zoom webinar that focused on the Humanitarian Advisory Group's recent research findings on measuring women's leadership and meaningful participation in COVID-19 responses.

The event opened with welcome remarks by Gaelle Demolis, the OIC of the UN Women Philippines Programme Presence Office. In her brief address, Ms. Demolis mentioned that the events of the past 12 months have highlighted the need for greater representation of women in leadership and decision-making. She also talked about how the UN Women and Humanitarian Advisory Group Framework for measuring women's leadership and participation in COVID-19 responses will allow countries to do a self-assessment with regard to the extent of input that their respective

women's rights organisations (WROs) and women-led organizations have had so far.

A presentation followed, delivered by Pip Henty and Maya Tamayo from the Humanitarian Advisory Group. The Presenters explained the purpose of their research: to develop a framework and tools for measuring women's leadership and participation in the COVID-19 responses in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines.

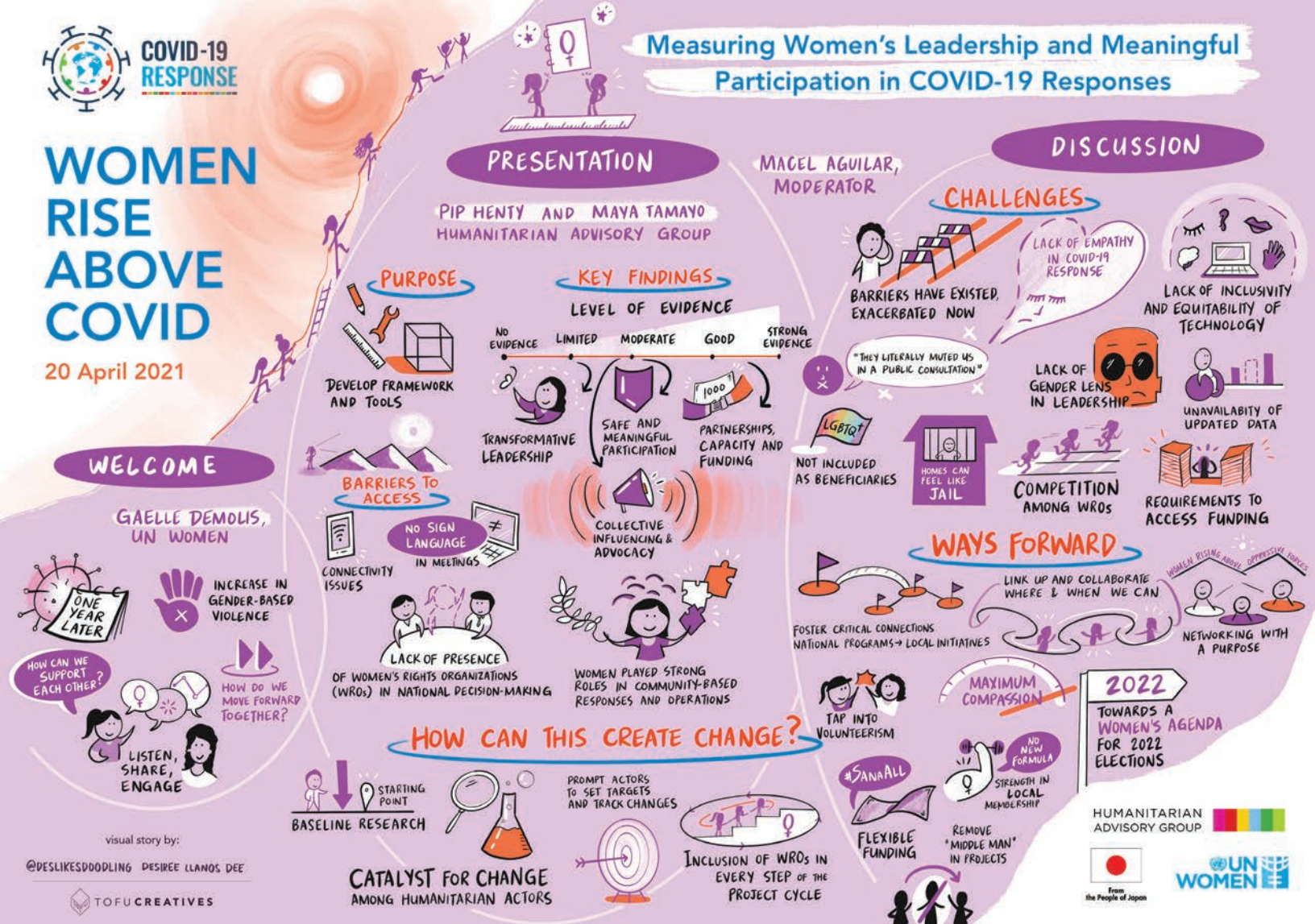
As Ms. Henty and Ms. Tamayo explained, the framework includes four results domains (safe and meaningful participation, collective influencing and advocacy, partnerships, capacity, and funding) and transformative leadership, with each domain having its own result indicator and progress indicators.

Ms. Henty and Ms. Tamayo shared that they found moderate evidence that (1) women and women's rights organisations (WROs) participate actively and safely in decision-making processes and can influence outcomes and (2) the priorities of national and local groups and movements that advocate for women's leadership and gender inclusion influence COVID-19 responses.

# WOMEN RISE ABOVE COVID

20 April 2021

## Measuring Women's Leadership and Meaningful Participation in COVID-19 Responses



**“What is our clamour?  
Why do we want to be noticed,  
or [why do we not want] to be invisible  
in the sight of many people? Because  
we want persons without disabilities to  
look at us as persons with THIS ability  
or THESE abilities.”**

Aya Tiongco, Women with Disability  
taking Action on Reproductive, and  
Sexual Health (WDARE)

Meanwhile, they also found good evidence that WROs have targeted and relevant support through partnership, capacity-building and funding for COVID-19 response. However, they only found limited evidence of transformative leadership roles in COVID-19 response planning and implementation among women and WROs.

The researchers also identified barriers to access, including connectivity issues, the lack of inclusiveness towards the disabled during meetings (i.e. no sign language in virtual meetings), and the lack of presence or involvement of WROs in national decision-making.

According to Ms. Henty and Ms. Tamayo, this study can create change by serving as a starting point for baseline research, serving as a catalyst for change among humanitarian actors, prompting organizations and coordination forums to set targets and track changes, and including WROs in each step of the project cycle.

**“We do not need to create a new formula; we just need to support the local women’s initiatives and their continuing pursuit to realize their agenda, even within this setting, this COVID-19 pandemic.”**

**Daryl Leyesa, *Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan* (PKKK) or National Rural Women Coalition**

A discussion followed, moderated by Macel Aguilar. The discussion included reactors Joie Cortina of CARE Philippines, Maroz Ramos of GALANG Philippines, Sabrina Gacad of Lunas Collective, Daryl Leyesa of the *Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan* (PKKK) or National Rural Women Coalition, Aya Tiongco of Women with Disability taking Action on REproductive, and Sexual Health (WDARE) and Bans Alqaseer of the Young Feminists Collective.

Ms. Leyesa and Ms. Cortina shared their thoughts on how donors and international partners can further support women’s rights organizations, so that they may safely and meaningfully access national level fora or coordination. Ms. Leyesa stressed that there’s really no “new formula,” and that responses to the local COVID-19 situation, particularly those that are gender-responsive, should remain the primary areas of support. However, she also emphasized the need for correct information to be disseminated to communities, as the knowledge gap hinders their participation in policy discourses. She also warned against new, “hidden”

**“It would have been really challenging and more difficult for CARE to respond to COVID-19 if the funders were not that creative and flexible and agile.”**

**Joie Cortina, CARE Philippines**

pandemics waiting to burst, as critical issues affecting women and girls are pushed to the background.

Ultimately, having (1) political connections to connect people at the grassroots level to the national level and (2) genuine representation at the national level can make a major positive impact. Meanwhile, Ms. Cortina shared CARE Philippines’ experience as being a conduit of resources, and highlighted that donors’ flexibility in fund realignment — being able to operate without hindrances from bureaucratic administrative processes — enabled them to respond to COVID-19 quickly and easily.

Ms. Tiongco addressed how partners can create opportunities for women’s rights organizations to have increased engagements on the national level. She mentioned the numerous challenges that persons with visual or other disabilities face in their efforts to participate in digital discussions. She also stressed

**“As mentioned in the research itself, women’s rights organizations are more visible and can participate more in the local levels. So how do we translate such kind of assistance, how do we provide assistance, if we ourselves are not capacitated in doing such?”**

**Maroz Ramos, GALANG Philippines**

the need for support from organizations holding these online meetings or webinars in enabling persons with disabilities to better participate in such endeavors.

Ms. Ramos, Ms. Gacad, and Ms. Tiongco provided insights on the barriers that organizations see in providing adequate inputs to COVID-19 response plans and programs. Ms. Ramos noted how the research highlighted barriers that existed even before COVID-19 affected the world. These include how WROs and women-led organizations are unable to participate in all stages of planning and implementation of programs, a lack of intersectionality perspective in considering the needs of different facets of individual or collective women (such as gender and economy), and lack of access to the internet and sources of credible information. Ms. Ramos also noted the limited gender lens in government and international organizations, as well as the lack of facilities to address the sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) of LBT women. With



adequate support from the government, Ms. Ramos believes that WROs and women-led organizations can be better equipped to translate and provide assistance at the grassroots level.

Meanwhile, Ms. Gacad pointed out that most of the centralized responses to the pandemic concentrated on law and order, instead of devoting much-needed focus on the sexual, mental, physical, psychosocial, and emotional wellbeing of ordinary citizens. She also noted the lack of empathy during the pandemic response, and highlighted how empathy as a public policy tool is crucial, especially since pandemic response is a healthcare issue that requires it.

Ms. Tiongco identified the lack of available, updated data (e.g. the number of PWDs in a community and where they're located), internet access challenges, and unavailability of sign language interpreters, closed captioners, and reading materials from webinars as barriers. She also mentioned violence against women with disabilities during the pandemic, as well as how COVID-19 put a stop to the livelihoods of many PWDs due to mobility restrictions, as major challenges.

Ms. Alqaseer responded to two questions: What shifts women's rights organizations can do to adapt to low or competing resources for COVID-19 response, and what shifts donors can do to sustain support for women's human rights organizations in the midst of low or competing resources for COVID-19 response. Overall, she highlighted the need to collaborate and pool resources with other organizations, realign and reallocate funds to account for indirect costs no longer applicable during the pandemic, recognize the need to remove non-applicable reporting requirements and focus on project implementation, and cut the middleman by going directly to grassroots organizations.

Ms. Gacad and the municipal mayor of Oras, Eastern Samar, Ms. Viviane Alvarez responded to the question of how can organizations, especially those representing marginalized or intersectionalities of women creatively yet effectively exercise its leadership and meaningful participation in COVID-19 response, given the shrinking space for democratic participation in the Philippines. Mayor Alvarez emphasized the need to deliver assistance to all areas of concern, not just certain sectors, so that no one will feel left behind. She summed it up thus: "It all boils down to good governance." Ms. Gacad stated that these problems had already existed before COVID-19, and that the pandemic only exacerbated them. For Ms. Gacad, it's time to stop being limited by scarce funding and to start being empowered by an untapped resource: transforming individual power and solidarity through exchanging services, partnerships and collaborations, and volunteer work.

With regard to supporting the electoral agenda of women's organizations, Chang Jordan of UN Women committed to work on jointly organizing consultations and conversations to provide support and a platform to discuss women's meaningful participation. Meanwhile, Ms. Leyesa shared her experiences in seeking out engagement with inter-agency bodies (national or local) with mandates on COVID-19 or emergency response. Her organization engaged the IATF in the early stages of the pandemic, forwarding their issues and input and pushing for mobility of food producers.

Lastly, Desiree Llanos Dee of Tofu Creatives shared a creative doodle synthesis of the discussion.

The event concluded with UN Women Regional Humanitarian and DRR Advisor Maria Holtsberg giving her closing remarks. She emphasized the need to do more and to work together to address the critical issues tackled in the discussion.

**“I think it all boils down to maximum compassion towards all stakeholders.”**

**Bans Alqaseer, Young Feminists Collective**



# 02

## LEAVING NO WOMAN BEHIND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC – PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT ON WOMEN IN DETENTION, INDIGENOUS WOMEN, WOMEN DISPLACED BY CONFLICT, WOMEN REFUGEES, STATELESS, ASYLUM-SEEKING WOMEN, AND WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

You may watch the videos under the #WomenRiseAboveCOVID Playlist at UN Women's YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/unwomen>.

May 4, 2021

**“We believe that there are good people in some areas of the government, and we have to maximize that to be able to champion them towards gender equality, improving the lives of the people, improving the lives of the community... because if not, who else will?”**

Joy Lascano, Balay Rehabilitation Center

The second installment of #WomenRiseAboveCOVID Online Discussions took place on May 4, 2021. Macel Aguilar moderated the Zoom webinar, the first of a two-part series on the pandemic herstories. The first discussion focused on women in detention, women, internally displaced women due to conflict, stateless/asylum-seeking/refugee women, and women living with HIV and AIDS. Mr. Jojo Mahinan and Mr. Bay Generoso served as sign language interpreters for the discussion.

The event opened with welcome remarks by Gaelle Demolis, the OIC-AI of the UN Women Philippines Programme Presence Office. In her short address, Ms. Demolis explained that the goal of the webinar was to recognize innovations and interventions by different organizations and agencies to support these women during the pandemic.

**“When we roll out the vaccinations, when we roll out healthcare, we have to include the women who are detained. They are in fact the most vulnerable to getting infected and they don't have access to emergency medical care.”**

Atty. Catherine Alvarez, StreetLawPH

The first speaker was Atty. Catherine Alvarez of StreetLawPH, who gave a detailed talk on the pandemic struggles of women in detention. According to Atty. Alvarez, due to the lockdowns and other COVID-19 mitigation policies enforced during the pandemic, these women have had hampered or limited access to decent food, sanitary necessities, medical treatment, and even legal consultations (largely due to technological and logistical limitations). Worse, the problem of congestion, which has existed even before COVID-19, remains a critical issue. Atty. Alvarez stressed the need for viable alternatives to in-person visits, as well as prioritizing women who are detained in vaccination and healthcare initiatives.

The second speaker was Ms. Maya Quirino from the Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center, who talked about Indigenous women. Ms. Quirino extensively discussed the struggles of Indigenous women during the pandemic, as well as the possible interventions such as improved access to information and technology, just energy transition, and access to legal services. She also talked about the importance of protecting forests and natural resources for the benefit of individuals, communities, and even the world. Lastly, Ms. Quirino highlighted the need for women-leadership and a “take-charge” attitude during times of crisis like this.

The third speaker, Ms. Kat Magtoto of the group Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights (Lilak), also gave

# WOMEN RISE ABOVE COVID

4 May 2021

Leaving No Woman Behind during the COVID-19 Pandemic

## HERSTORIES



crucial insights about Indigenous women. Ms. Magtoto talked about how the pandemic multiplied the already-existing burdens of women in Indigenous communities, including the deterioration of environmental safeguards, the intensified criminalization of their leaders and defenders, and a rise in state, corporate, community, and partner-perpetrated violence. She also emphasized the need to support Indigenous women who, rather than being left behind, are actually being pushed behind.

The fourth speaker was Ms. Joy Lascano from Balay Rehabilitation Center. She gave a presentation on internally-displaced women due to conflict. According to Ms. Lascano, provinces and a number of contiguous areas under Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) characterize the poorest not just in Mindanao, but in the Philippines. These people have long suffered from armed conflicts, lack of access to quality services, lack of an enabling environment that provides equal opportunities for women and girls, and hidden gender-based violence. Despite all of these,

**“We need effective leaders from the global and national venues. Communities should be involved, and various society sectors should be represented. This is not purely a medical effort, nor should it be a purely military or administrative one. Multidisciplinary engagement is crucial.”**

Dr. Louie Ocampo, UNAIDS

such women have displayed extraordinary resilience. Ms. Lascano shared some of their pandemic initiatives to address these issues, as well as how the experience has improved their efforts in mainstreaming gender work in their Mindanao projects and inspired them to incorporate their learnings in other projects and areas.

The fifth speaker was Dr. Louie Ocampo of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), who talked about women living with HIV/AIDS during the pandemic. Dr. Ocampo stated that the Philippines has the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in the world, and that the pandemic has significantly affected the country's fight against the disease. In particular, there was a decrease in the number of HIV tests and treatment coverage, contributing to a treatment gap that increased by 19%. Furthermore, women have historically fared poorer than men in this fight, and the pandemic certainly did not improve matters. He also discussed some adaptive measures, including community-led initiatives, and ended with a call for stronger policy implementation and preparedness initiatives.

Last but not the least, Ms. Maria Louella "Lui" Gamboa and Ms. Aerial Ann Gonzales of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) handled the topic of stateless, asylum-seeking and refugee women. They began by providing specific legal definitions and statistics for the various kinds of persons of concern (POC) worldwide and in the Philippines, to segue into

how and why these conditions affect the quality of life of these individuals. Ms. Gamboa discussed positive interventions, such as the inclusion of women POC in frameworks, programs, and services, undertaking a "whole of society" approach to addressing their concerns, and mainstreaming their stories and issues. Ms. Gamboa also enumerated ways to support POC women, such as adopting a participatory and inclusive approach, enhancing policies and legal frameworks, enhanced disaggregated data collection, and the full implementation of the Magna Carta of Women.

Afterwards, Atty. Alvarez responded to questions from the audience. She said that the jail lockdowns and the transition to online hearings have limited detained women's access to their lawyers. She also mentioned that data on women with disabilities in detention centers is lacking, highlighting a need to see the actual situation in those venues.

To conclude the webinar, Desiree Llanos Dee of Tofu Creatives shared a creative doodle synthesis of the discussion.

The event concluded with Cami Adle of UN Women giving her closing remarks. She emphasized the importance of discussing these topics and shedding light on these women sectors.

**“More than being left behind, Indigenous women are actually being pushed behind. That is why we need to push back.”**

**Kat Magtoto, Purple Action for  
Indigenous Women's Rights (Lilak)**



# 03

## LEAVING NO WOMAN BEHIND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC – PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT ON WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

You may watch the videos under the #WomenRiseAboveCOVID Playlist at UN Women's YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/unwomen>.

May 4, 2021

**“Women with disabilities should be recognized as an important resource and asset. Those who have been trained with and have been engaged in the data collection must be continuously provided with capacity development, training, and other mentoring and coaching activities.”**

Corazon Clarin

The third installment of #WomenRiseAboveCOVID Online Discussions took place on May 11, 2021. Ms. Macel Aguilar moderated the Zoom webinar, the second of a two-part series on the pandemic herstories. The second discussion focused on women with disabilities pre- and post-pandemic, and featured representatives of disability-focused organizations. Mr. Jojo Mahinan and Mr. Bay Generoso served as sign language interpreters for the discussion.

The event opened with welcome remarks by Mr. Edward T. Ello, Acting Country Director Humanity & Inclusion Philippines and Indonesia. In his short address, Mr. Ello acknowledged the barriers experienced by women and girls with disabilities, even before the pandemic started. He also shared two recommendations that would help in the discussion:

**“We have to build a robust roof of gender and disability inclusive development, specifically on providing an adequate standard of living, with these four pillars: awareness raising, participation, empowerment, and comprehensive accessibility.”**

Ms. Gina Rose Balanlay

improving the information and access to social protection of women and girls with disabilities, and undertaking consultations with women and girls with disabilities which can serve as a basis before implementing laws and policy changes.

The first speaker was Ms. Agatha Joy Hega-Lacambra, a board member of the Philippine Federation of the Deaf, for South Mindanao region. Ms. Hega-Lacambra shared how the situation was for her and for other women with disabilities prior to the pandemic, and how COVID-19 has exacerbated challenges in transportation, employment, and mobility because of the lack of sign language interpreters, as well as lack of food and financial support from the government. Ms. Hega-Lacambra also shared how face masks and face shields have become an additional expense for women with disabilities, and how pregnant women fear going to the hospital because of swab tests. She concluded her talk on a hopeful note, wishing that solutions could be implemented for these challenges soon.

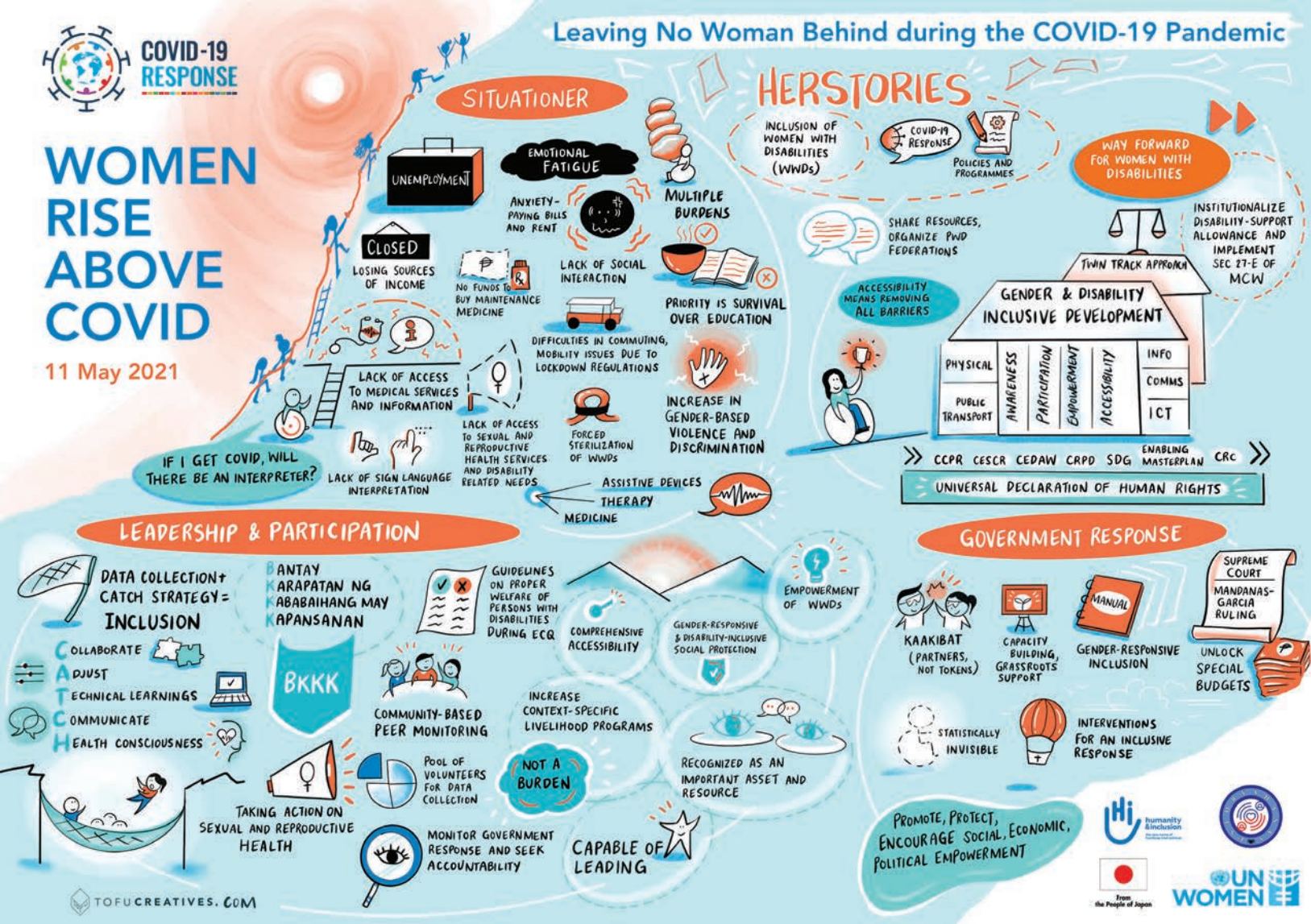
The next speakers were Ms. Amie Dava and Ms. Deborah “Debbie” Panela. Ms. Dava is the Persons with Disabilities Affairs Officer (PDAO) of the Municipality of San Buenavista, Antique, while Ms. Panela represented the Federation of Persons with Disability Associations in Iloilo City. Ms. Dava started their session by sharing how women with disabilities had gainful employment prior to COVID-19, but suffered during the pandemic due to lack of access to information



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and communication brought about by their difficulty in communicating with their environment. She also drew attention to how helpful interpreters have been during the pandemic, as well as the programs and initiatives from both LGUs and NGOs (that fill in the gaps for the LGUs). However, Ms. Dava highlighted five pandemic problem areas: unemployment, business closures, money-related anxiety, lack of funds for maintenance medicine, and limited transportation.

Meanwhile, Ms. Panela shared two case studies illustrating the pandemic-era challenges of families including persons with disabilities. The first case study was about a breadwinning mother with a neurologically challenged husband and children who, along with her, suffered abuse through her husband. The second case study centered on a mother with disability who was stressed out, which led her to lashed out at her 12 children, some of whom are neurologically challenged; the children could not participate in online classes because their parents could only afford to pay for

**“Women should be taken care of and loved. Let’s protect women and help each other right amid COVID-19.”**

Deborah “Debbie” Panela

basic necessities for sustenance. Ms. Panela also went into detail on the pre-pandemic situation, pandemic gains, post-pandemic challenges, and losses/struggles experienced by families. At the end of their shared presentation, Ms. Dava discussed a handful of positive post-pandemic impacts and lessons, and reminded the audience that women need protection, and support from one another, during the pandemic.

The fourth speaker was Ms. Maria Fe Maravillas, the President of the Federation of Persons with Disability in NCR. Ms. Maravillas focused on the risks and challenges during COVID-19, mainly involving mobility,

access to services and support, access to therapy, the ability to purchase medication, and access to COVID-19 information. She then shared the various coping mechanisms that they employed during the pandemic, guided by available data: a five-step action plan called CATCH (Collaborate, Adjust, Technical learning, Communicate better, and Health consciousness). After going into detail about the different programs and initiatives, Ms. Maravillas ended her talk with a reminder to build an inclusive society for all.

The next presenters were Ms. Aya Tiongco-Sunit, Ms. Shiela May Aggarao, and Ms. Corazon Clarin. Ms. Tiongco-Sunit, the Coordinator for Women with Disability taking Action on REproductive and Sexual Health (W-DARE), started the talk by sharing how they were before COVID-19, and how the pandemic worsened their situation. Issues highlighted included forced sterilization, physical and attitudinal barriers, insensitive health care service providers, the lack of sign language interpreters, and the lack of access to information, all narrated by W-DARE members.

Next, Ms. Aggarao, the Secretary of the Nationwide Organization of Visually-impaired Empowered Ladies Inc. (NOVEL), talked about how women with disabilities took the lead in community-based COVID-19 initiatives during the first 10 months of the lockdown. She also touched upon the government-mandated guidelines on providing proper welfare of persons with disabilities, the community-based peer monitoring of the situation of women with disabilities, and the negative impacts of the pandemic on women and girls with disabilities. Ms. Aggarao ended her segment by sharing recommendations on comprehensive accessibility, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive social protection, and empowerment and participation of women with disabilities.

Ms. Clarin, the President of the Women with Disability Leap for Economic and Social Progress (WOW LEAP) Region 7, continued the presentation with a detailed report of the pivots to the 2020 Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office (PDAO) programs and plans in light of the pandemic. According to Ms. Clarin, the three main takeaways to ensure that women with disability are not left behind are that (1) women with disabilities should be viewed as capable of contributing and coming up with solutions instead of merely recipients of aid, (2) women with disabilities will not be left behind if they are recognized and accounted for,

and (3) women with disabilities should be recognized as an important resource and asset.

Last but not the least, the fifth speaker was Ms. Gina Rose Balanlay, a Founding Member and Treasurer of the Nationwide Organization of Visually Impaired Empowered Ladies Inc. (NOVEL). Ms. Balanlay focused on showing a way forward for women with disabilities. She shared and explained the rationale behind a diagram of a house, the parts of which detailed a comprehensive approach to supporting and ensuring inclusivity for women and girls with disability. She ended her segment by highlighting the four social security guarantees that must be defined at the national level.

Afterwards, a moderated discussion followed. Engr. Emerito Rojas, the Executive Director of the National Council of Disability Affairs (NCDA) started by sharing his thoughts on the presentations. He praised the efforts of the women behind the initiatives discussed during the nearly two-hour talk, while stressing the importance of sharing resources and extending support and assistance in these crucial times. Meanwhile, through the use of data and pandemic stories, Atty. Kristine Yuzon Chaves, the Executive Director of the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), talked about the steps that the PCW took to provide support to the sector throughout the lockdown period.

Ms. Aguilar took note of one question from the audience regarding concrete actions taken by the organizations that presented, as well as plans for integrating the results of the survey or peer community monitoring to respective organizations. Afterwards, a call to action led by Estoryahanay with the support of Humanity and Inclusion and UN Women was formally put forward.

As with the previous webinars, Desiree Llanos Dee of Tofu Creatives shared a creative doodle synthesis of the discussion. The event concluded with Ms. Hega-Lacambra briefly sharing her messages of congratulations to her fellow speakers, as well as the organizers of the event.

# 04

## USAPANG BAKUNA: A DIALOGUE WITH WOMEN ON COVID-19 VACCINES AND THE GOVERNMENT'S NATIONAL VACCINATION DEPLOYMENT PLAN

You may watch the videos under the #WomenRiseAboveCOVID Playlist at UN Women's YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/unwomen>.

May 4, 2021

**“Vaccines must be affordable and accessible  
to those who need them most.”**

**Dr. Macky Quiazon**

The fourth and final installment of #WomenRiseAboveCOVID Online Discussions took place on May 18, 2021. Ms. Cami Adle of UN Women moderated the Zoom webinar, which featured a dialogue with women on COVID-19 vaccines and the government's national vaccination deployment plan. Mr. Jojo Mahinan and Mr. Bay Generoso served as sign language interpreters for the discussion.

The first speaker was Dr. Nina Gloriani, the Head of the Vaccine Development Expert Panel of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST). In her presentation, Dr. Gloriani explained the COVID-19 vaccine selection process, as well as the clinical trials and the process of awarding Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for the vaccines. Aside from laying out the criteria for evaluating and approving vaccines, Dr. Gloriani also devoted time to explaining how the vaccines differ from one another, the concept of vaccine efficacy, and the different mutations and variants of SARS-CoV-2.

The second speaker was Dr. Beverly Ho, Director IV

**“Vaccines are safe, effective, and free.”**

**Dr. Beverly Ho**

for the Health Promotion Bureau at the Department of Health (DOH). Dr. Ho talked about generating

demand for COVID-19 vaccines and encouraging people not just to sign up for the vaccine, but to actually show up on their scheduled dates and get vaccinated. She highlighted three key messages in her talk: that vaccines are safe, effective, and free; that people should sign up for the vaccine with their LGUs; and that people should continue to practice minimum public health standards (MPHS) even with the promise of a vaccine. She also clarified that vaccines prevent severe COVID-19 infections and that none of the vaccines can cause COVID-19. Additionally, she dispelled some common myths and misconceptions about the vaccine, and addressed the problem of fake news. Dr. Ho emphasized that the vaccines are meant to protect everyone, and that we can only adequately protect everyone, especially the more susceptible members of the community, if we all get vaccinated. She also shared their multi-step approach to health communication regarding the COVID-19 vaccines, including the materials they've released, their local partners in information dissemination, and their guidelines for local officials. She concluded her talk by reiterating the key messages.

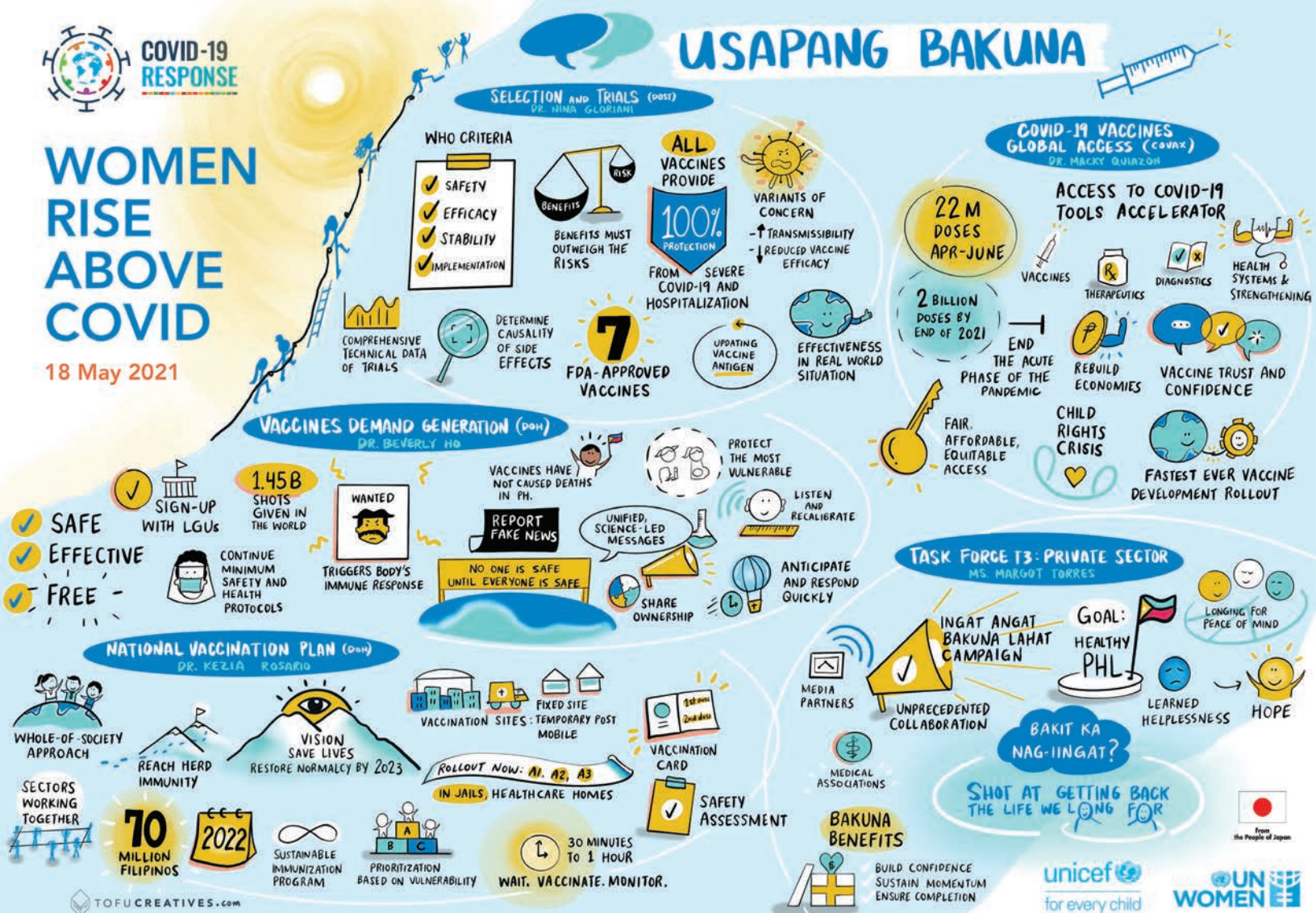
The third speaker was Dr. Kezia Rosario, the National Vaccination Operations Center Secretariat of DOH's Disease Prevention and Control Bureau. Dr. Rosario talked about the COVID-19 vaccine deployment and vaccination program. She reminded the public that



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vaccines do not have commercial permits yet, and are just being distributed under EUA at the moment. She also detailed the “Whole-of-Society” approach that aims to vaccinate around 70 million eligible Filipinos by mid-2022 to achieve herd immunity. Dr. Rosario shared the framework for vaccine allocation, including the different priority sectors and how they are assigned. According to Dr. Rosario, the vaccination strategy utilizes fixed vaccination sites, temporary posts, and mobile sites in order to achieve the program’s targets. Lastly, she explained other critical steps such as the scheduling process for vaccinations and the response protocols for reported vaccine adverse effects.

The fourth speaker was Dr. Mark Benjamin Quiazon of UNICEF, who talked about the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) initiative. He started with a quick review of the current situation of vaccine procurement in the Philippines, as well as a brief rundown of the different vaccines and their respective developers. He also explained the

“So we want to restore the lives of the Filipino people prior to the pandemic. *Kung hindi man tayo maka-achieve ng talagang balik doon sa normal, at least, near-normal. (If we cannot achieve a return to normal, at least [we aim for] near-normal)*”

Dr. Kezia Rosario

Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) for accelerating access and development of COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines, as well as its four pillars (vaccine, therapeutics, diagnostics, and health systems strengthening). According to Dr. Quiazon, COVAX serves as ACT-A’s vaccine pillar, with the



aim of securing doses for at least 20% of countries' populations, diversely and actively managing each country's vaccine portfolio, quick delivering available vaccines, ending the pandemic's acute phase, and helping countries rebuild their respective economies. He also detailed UNICEF's role in COVAX, providing information on how the organization is approaching vaccine procurement, distribution, and confidence/communication under the initiative. Finally, Dr. Quiazon shared the latest update on COVAX support in the Philippines.

Last but not the least, the fifth speaker was McDonald's Philippines managing director Margot Torres, representing the government's Task Force T3 under the Inter-Agency Task Force of the government. Ms. Torres, the Communications Advocacy co-lead of the *Ingat Angat Bakuna Lahat* (Take Care, Rise Above, Vaccinate Everyone) program, gave a brief overview about the initiative, including its communication architecture, a list of its partners in the media and medical sectors, and trends on vaccine acceptance. She emphasized how generating demand for the vaccines among the vaccine-hesitant will become even more critical after everyone already willing to take the vaccine has been vaccinated. Ms. Torres also shared some of the communication materials that have already been developed, as well as the various activations on digital platforms to debunk myths and provide credible information about the vaccines (through webinars and online assets that can be downloaded from the official website). The webinar then switched to a recorded message from the Philippine Information Agency featuring

Director-General Ramon L. Cualoping III, who affirmed the agency's commitment to support the vaccination initiatives in the Philippines.

***“Ingat Angat Bakuna Lahat  
(Take Care, Rise Above, Vaccinate  
Everyone) hopes to inspire Filipinos  
to get vaccinated, as this is our shot at  
getting back the life that we long for.”***

Margot Torres

Afterwards, a moderated discussion followed. Dr. Ho, Dr. Gloriani, and Dr. Quiazon answered some questions from the audience.

**Q: What should a person do if she/he experiences side effects after getting a COVID-19 vaccine?**

**A:** Those who receive the vaccines should stay at the vaccination site 15 to 30 minutes after receiving the vaccine to be able to properly monitor them for any adverse effects. The government will provide the necessary assistance for patients who'll experience vaccine-related adverse effects.

**Q: Can the vaccination card be used as a travel pass?**

**A:** While there are currently no strict regulations in place concerning this, it's still better to get vaccinated, regardless of any travel plans.

**Q: How long will the vaccine protect me?**

**A:** Current data is limited, and it will take a longer observation period before a definitive answer becomes clear. However, many vaccinated patients still had antibodies six to nine months after receiving the vaccine.

**Q: What is AstraZeneca's efficacy rate?**

**A:** The numbers have improved over the last four weeks: 85% in the United States and 88% in Scotland, to be precise, based on studies.

**Q: Can a person with [insert comorbidity here] safely receive the vaccine?**

**A:** In general, as long as proper protocols and screening are observed, anyone can be vaccinated, especially if the comorbidities are controlled. However, specific precautions must be undertaken for people with asthma and allergies.

**Q: Is a medical certificate required for [insert purpose here] or getting vaccinated?**

**A:** Securing a medical certificate will ultimately depend on what the patient might need it for, as well as the patient's current condition or state of health. Only people with certain severe illnesses (e.g. heart attack within the last three months, currently undergoing chemotherapy, etc.) will likely need a medical certificate.

**Q: Is there any truth to the rumors that unvaccinated people will no longer be allowed to enter malls and other establishments or board commercial flights?**

**A:** This is currently not being enforced in the Philippines, and authorities are still assessing the pros and cons of such a regulation.

**Q: How can a person convince his/her parents with diabetes (or other comorbidities) to overcome their fear of the vaccine?**

**A:** Look at their motivations and what they value most, and then incorporate them into the argument to take the vaccine (for example, the desire to see their loved ones and friends again).

**Q: How many senior citizens have already received the vaccine?**

**A:** Any interested parties can reach out to Dr. Rosario's office for this data.

**Q: If I'm a frontliner with comorbidities, must I wait for my LGU to schedule my vaccination, or can I just get the vaccine from a different city?**

**A:** The public is allowed to avail the vaccine in other LGUs if they have slots, especially for frontliners with comorbidities.

**Q: What's the procedure that private companies have to follow when bringing in the vaccine?**

**A:** Any private companies interested in bringing in the vaccines may reach out to the office of Secretary Carlito Galvez, which is the office that coordinates with vaccine manufacturers.

**Q: What are the systems used by the government to make COVID-19 information accessible to people with disabilities (e.g. visual impairments, hard of hearing, etc.)?**

**A:** The government's various COVID-19 communication initiatives use Filipino Sign Language (FSL) in their publicity materials, as well as platforms that are easily accessible to the public (e.g. television and social media).

**Q: Can the vaccines worsen the health conditions of people with disabilities?**

**A:** No.

**Q: Is the planned mega-vaccination site in *Nayong Pilipino* truly needed?**

**A:** The Philippines does need bigger, more spacious vaccination sites, regardless of location.

**Q: Can there be a vaccination priority group for solo parents?**

**A:** Classifications are based solely on the established guidelines for priority groups. If a person who happens to be a solo parent falls under the higher-priority groups, then they can avail the vaccine accordingly.

**Q: What are your thoughts on the oral vaccine being developed by a Filipino priest?**

**A:** The public should wait for further studies and data to be announced.

**Q: When will vaccinations for A4 and A5 priority groups begin?**

**A:** Vaccination for the A4 priority group will start during the last week of May in NCR, and A5 will follow soon. However, other areas in the Philippines may have to wait a bit more.

As with the previous webinars, Desiree Llanos Dee of Tofu Creatives shared a creative doodle synthesis of the discussion. This, and a gentle reminder to get vaccinated from Mr. Paul del Rosario of UNICEF, concluded the webinar (and the #WomenRiseAboveCOVID series).



