

COVID-19 Crisis and Women in Asia

Filling the Gaps: Reflections from COVID-19 and the prospects for gender justice and digitalization in the Philippines

Maria Cleofe Gettie C. Sandoval and Diana Katrina Fontamillas

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Executive Summary

The onset of digital technologies changed the way people communicate, learn, transact, gather and share information, among others. It has made irreversible improvements in many areas of our daily lives. For women, while it has presented many opportunities, particularly in economic empowerment, the progress in the use of digital technologies has also brought gender-related concerns to the surface. With COVID-19, the impact of the digital area on the economic and social lives of women have become more apparent. Prior to COVID-19, the labour-force participation of women was generally lower than men. Women's proportion of work is also higher in the service industry, while men's work is in agriculture. While women contributed in the productive sphere, they continued to carry more of the burden of reproductive work than men. COVID-19 did not change these gender relations, rather, it highlighted the imbalance when women shifted to more stay-at-home or alternative work arrangements. Digital technology offered opportunities for women to continue working at home, however, this arrangement

also increased the work they have been expected to perform in their homes. Meanwhile, women in Bangsamoro hit with the same pandemic were not presented with the same economic opportunities as women outside of the autonomous region. Poor access to electricity and mobile data connections did not allow as many alternative work arrangements for them, thus leaving the women with fewer or no work options. In this scenario, what policy support is available to women to improve their economic opportunities? While there are laws promoting digital technology or alternative work arrangements, these legislations did not foresee a pandemic, nor did they include a gender perspective. In order to assist women to navigate the digital world and further their economic improvement, there is a need to focus on improving their access to digital tools, improve their skills and capabilities, and provide a policy-reform environment that takes into consideration the gendered situation of men and women at work and the security and cultural concerns of women in Bangsamoro.

Introduction

Women's marginalized capacity, manifested in lack of or difficulty to find and/or negotiate for better work opportunities, is among the persistent global gender issues on economic empowerment. Pre-existing gender inequalities mean that women have less access to productive resources than men, including access to education, land, technology and financial resources (Baird and Hill, 2020). Even where women are engaged in paid work, they are over-represented in jobs with lower wages and poorer conditions, leaving them economically vulnerable and without any reserves to weather an economic crisis (Baird and Hill, 2020).

COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on the economic and social lives of women, especially during the early lockdown and quarantine phase of the crisis response in the country. When COVID-19 hit in 2020, existing gender inequalities in the Philippines were exacerbated; in the economic sphere, women already had a lower labour-force participation rate than men and comprised a majority of unpaid family workers. Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (2022) show that labour force participation rate is higher among men at 72.9 per cent, compared to women at 48.1 per cent. While this is so, female-headed households have slightly higher incomes and savings than male-headed households, most likely brought about by women's home-based livelihoods and businesses set up during the pandemic.

For example, in the online selling platform Lazada, women made up two-thirds of sellers; however, their sales shrunk by 27 per cent in 2020 (International Finance Corporation, 2021). The heightened community quarantines in 2020 resulted in the closures of micro, small and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs), impacting women who comprise 98 per cent of these enterprises; only 26 per cent of these MSMEs are knowledgeable about digital initiatives (Digital Transformation in the Philippines and its Future Trajectory, n.d.). Service sector workers, particularly those in the hotel and restaurant industry, were most affected by the lockdowns. In the Philippines, 77 per cent of female workers and 46 per cent of male workers are employed in the service sector (Australian Aid, 2020).

Alongside these economic challenges, women still bore the brunt of domestic and care work. The crisis has contributed to women's unpaid work and has seen an

increase in the time already spent on the domestic load. Women's health was impacted by the compounded exhaustion due to domestic tasks and care work on top of the productive work they have to do (UN Women Asia and the Pacific, 2022).

In the social sphere, education was hampered due to shifts in online learning. Lack of equipment and internet connectivity affected students and parents (often in the hands of women) who may not necessarily have the knowledge, skills and time to oversee their children's education while at home. Gender-based violence and exploitation of children cases went off the charts, offline and online. While access to social media remained, misinformation on COVID-19 became prevalent, and women's access to life-saving information was threatened. The same applies to accessing information about armed conflict or other security threats, affecting women's and girls' responses to seek safety, which is more prominent in conflict-affected areas such as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

While over 90 per cent of the barangays (local administrative unit) in the Philippines have access to electricity supply, only 91 per cent have mobile data signals, which are more prominent in urban communities. In Bangsamoro, only 68.4 per cent of barangays have a cellular connection, and only 4 per cent of the households in the region have an internet connection (Mirandilla-Santos, 2021).

In the report submitted by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression to the UN Human Rights Council, Frank LaRue underscored that "without Internet access, which facilitates economic development and the enjoyment of a range of human rights, marginalised groups and developing States remain trapped in a disadvantaged situation, thereby perpetuating inequality both within and between States." Indeed, women and girls were already in a disadvantaged position before the pandemic in terms of access to digital technology, and the pandemic could further aggravate such inequalities.

As the Philippines faces a significant digital gap, how does this impact women and girls? What responses have been made to bridge this gap so that women and girls

are not further left behind? What opportunities could be tapped to address gender inequalities in digitalisation in the country? What policies could be set in place, and how can feminist or women's organizations contribute to such policies to address gender inequalities in digitalization? This paper will explore these questions and provide recommendations for bridging gender inequalities in digitalization in the Philippines.

Research objectives, approach and methodology

This research has the following objectives:

1. Assess the impact (whether positive or negative) that the inequalities created by the pandemic and prolonged armed conflict and violence have had on digital lives and access to technology on the lives of women and girls in the region.
2. Examine how current policy frameworks and political initiatives on digitalization by both the national and the Bangsamoro government influence the lives of women and girls.
3. Map and analyze the government responses and interventions of the national government created to bridge the gap, and whether these have gendered considerations, so that those in areas of armed conflict are not further left behind.
4. Describe good practices implemented by women's and feminist organizations to respond to the inadequate digital access in the Bangsamoro.
5. Propose policy recommendations for the national and regional government that could be set in place in the Bangsamoro and analyse how feminist or women's organizations can contribute to such policies to address gender inequalities in digitalization.

The study will mainly involve a review of literature, drawing from secondary sources. The research will also gather the input of key informants and organizations in the Philippines.

General Overview: Impact of Pandemic on Gender Equality

The 2022 Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) of the World Economic Forum reports that the Philippines ranks 19th out of 146 countries, two places down from its 2021 rank and way below its 6th-place rank in 2006 when the gender report was first issued. The GGI measures the gender gap in terms of political empowerment, health and survival, educational attainment and economic participation and opportunity. While the ranking is the second-highest in East Asia and the Pacific region next to New Zealand, the report concludes that in the area of economic participation, the gender gap between men and women is still significant, with men's participation in economic activity 24.5 percentage points higher than women's. The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) reports that the female labour force participation of the Philippines in 2018 is lowest in ASEAN at 4 per cent (Cabegin and Gaddi, 2019). The report concludes that even if the overseas work of women is included, the rate is low compared with neighbouring countries. By industry, work is gendered, with women's work mostly in the service sector while men are in the agricultural and industry sector (Cabegin and Gaddi, 2019). The industries most affected by COVID-19 are where women make up the majority of workers, namely retail, tourism, accommodation and manufacturing, putting their jobs in danger and their labour-force participation in decline (Baird and Hill, 2020). COVID-19 also intensified women's multiple burden and unpaid care work when they found themselves either jobless or working from home.

Bangsamoro and the Pandemic

Despite economic growth and international development assistance centred in the BARMM, the region remains the poorest and most vulnerable in the Philippines. International development organizations recognize the relevance of social protection and creation of shock responsive programmes.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, government measures in the region were able to contain the spread of the virus. However, as Bangsamoro mainly operates as an agricultural economy with limited private-sector participation, the indirect impacts of mobility restrictions and lockdowns affected vulnerable groups in the

region. A UNDP report shows that despite fewer cases in Bangsamoro than the rest of the country (2021), the livelihoods and businesses were more affected. The assessment even shows that those in the informal sectors, most of whom are women, were among the hardest hit due to work-from-home orders and work stoppages.

Gender inequality and digitalization

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a massive shift to digitalization. Companies report that enhanced e-commerce and digitalization is the future for their businesses, with more companies expected to embed flexible work-from-home arrangements as part of their new normal operations (UN Women Asia and the Pacific, 2022). An Asian Development Bank (2021) report suggested that businesses must now shift to more contactless transactions, shifting towards digital technology to provide financial sustainability for their businesses. This shift to digitalization, however, requires skills that ensure participation in these spaces.

In South-East Asia, women participate more in technology than their global counterparts. However, in comparison to other sectors, this number is low (Poh, 2020). Women account for 32 per cent of the region's technology workforce, while the global average is 28 per cent. With COVID-19 redefining the workplace, creating an environment that sees more remote work is becoming the norm in the region (Rastogi et. al, 2021).

The Foundation for Media Alternatives, a non-stock, non-profit organization that assists communities and citizens in the strategies and appropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT), asserts that the COVID-19 pandemic affected women's job security. They emphasized that women must have access and control to technology not only via equipment but also through the skills and literacy to navigate the virtual landscape (UP Center for Women and Gender Studies, 2021).

In the Philippines, women recognize that technologies and digital platforms can grant them access to better financial opportunities. They use platforms in various ways, such as for sustaining livelihood as they seek support from formal institutions such as non-

governmental organizations and government services (Center for International Private Enterprise, 2021), for online learning where modules were made available for upskilling (UP Center for Women and Gender Studies, 2021), and even to participate in e-commerce platforms, where women make up two-thirds of business owners (ABS-CBN News, 2021).

How has the pandemic and digitalization affected women in Bangsamoro?

The presence of digital technologies and infrastructure have the potential to influence conflict dynamics that can either increase the risk of harm or bridge the programmes for support. However, armed conflict and violence have a negative impact, creating lower-tech digital environments (Taylor, 2018). While the new normal modalities have shown that shifting towards digitalization will be advantageous, in Bangsamoro the cost of connecting remains high as the current digital infrastructure is not widely and robustly established yet.

Compounding challenges to education creating obstacles for workforce participation

In Bangsamoro, the absence of reliable infrastructure has added to the inadequate preparation for new online learning methods, compounding the lack of alternative learning mediums, and the absence of infrastructure such as radio or TV programmes, and of reliable internet access. While more remote work and use of digital platforms became the norm during the pandemic and in the new normal, Bangsamoro lags behind as it transitions towards fully establishing itself not only as a political entity but also an economic centre.

The lack of internet connectivity in the Bangsamoro region had the largest impact on earning and education (Bustillo et al, 2022). COVID-19 has exposed how digital connectivity in the context of geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas have kept many students and learners from enjoying the benefits of internet technology and digitalization. Already marginalized learners had to deal with the effect of conflict, and now with the pandemic and its shift towards more digital modalities.

During active conflict, many women would flee their homes taking only the clothes on their and their family's back. Stories of women who fled the Marawi siege in 2017 show that many fled their homes without essential identification documents such as birth, school and employment records. Concerns post-siege show

how the lack of access to these proofs of identity created legal difficulties. These included challenges in regaining legal claims over their properties, names and employment positions. Access to these documents can help the women reclaim their sense of identity. These documents can help with practical, long-term services such as access to income and employment opportunities, as well as allow them to take government and school examinations that will help them to move forward with their lives (Silbert, 2019).

Conflict-related challenges compound access to education and income opportunities, creating obstacles to labour-force participation.

During the national lockdown, institutions were forced to switch to distance-learning modalities. However, higher education institutions (HEIs) in Bangsamoro have stated their lack of readiness to switch to virtual learnings (Ilieva, et al, 2021), stating the lack of available infrastructure in the region and their human-resource capacities. The HEIs recognize that lack of technology and infrastructure brought about by decades long armed conflict make it challenging to adapt to digital technologies.

New ways to operate: the work of women's groups and peace activism

The pandemic has slowed down the implementation of the Bangsamoro peace agreement and its transition process. The normalization and decommissioning processes were delayed, as the Philippine government shifted funds away from the post-conflict processes to more pressing concerns such as the COVID-19 response (Mercado, 2020).

However, the shift to online modalities showed how infrastructure and digital technologies created links and ways for women's groups to operate within the region.

The shift to digital spaces not only affected women's access to services, but also made it challenging for them to carry out their community work and activism. Carrying out women's political participation as part of their peace activism was one such arena where several new obstacles were highlighted by the widening divide caused by the new normal.

Women peace activists initially shifted their roles from disseminating information on the Bangsamoro peace agreements and what women can gain in the process,

to information dissemination and psycho-social support. Sandoval (2022), in an interview with FES Asia Editorial, pointed out that social media has become an important advocacy tool for women's organizations and peace activists, by disseminating information and live streamed events on women's human rights, and establishing mental health hotlines and emergency services.

It's not all grey skies for women activists, as this shift has provided a safer environment for activists to continue engaging communities, and has lessened the risk and vulnerabilities compounded by conflict and the pandemic (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders et al., 2021). This only goes to show how in some contexts, increased participation in newer technologies such as online and social media may contribute to fostering harmony and support in post-conflict communities. The argument is that access to information and better data through digital media will lead to collective engagement (Fishkin et al., 2005).

Digital communities were active breeding grounds for online recruitment especially in the context following the Marawi siege (The Asia Foundation, 2019). While the recruitment is largely disorganized and opportunistic, women still remain a vulnerable target for violent extremist engagement. However, according to the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and New York University research (2021), as new approaches to peacebuilding by women activists have been adopted amid the public health crisis, the lockdown measures saw a significant slowing of recruitment rate by jihadist groups in the region which primarily use online and digital media.

The ability to pivot and use technology requires a certain kind of balance: Employing technology and social media proficiently whilst also protecting from online attacks, propaganda, and recruitment is a critical skill for women in the context of peace, conflict and gender equality. This requires sufficient literacy. Women peacebuilders, particularly in the national activist space, must consider how they can bring their activism closer to those who may be separated, either through skill or infrastructure, and ensure that these disparities are reduced.

Women's participation, alongside ensuring they have the skills to navigate new tech, will be key to build communities of practice and coordination of efforts, an area that continues to be a key hurdle for women peace workers in post-conflict Bangsamoro.

Shock responsive systems: databases, registries, and early warning and early response

Early warning and early response systems employ volunteers from communities to gather data and information about incidents and situational change. Tedurays are Indigenous Peoples living in their ancestral domain in Upi and South Upi municipalities of Maguindanao province. They have been consistently targeted for land grabbing by Moro and Christian settlers, who generally own or are supported by private armed groups. These violent outbreaks have forced the group to flee and seek out evacuation sites. To respond to the displacement, the Women's Organization of Rajah Mamalu Descendants created a quick response team to respond to the increasing displacement. Using their proximity to the attacks, and their intuitive knowledge of their land and their people, the group provides early warning and early response (EWER) support to local leaders and security sectors (UN Women, 2022b). Their EWER system, albeit raw, plays a crucial role in providing support to local government units and their local Department of Social Welfare and Development. The system works as an informal monitoring network, informing the local government and security forces through the use of mobile phones and satellite-based two-way radios to inform about violent incidents and other possible incidents of interest.

The system is heavily reliant on the presence of a responsive and durable infrastructure to ensure that the early warning is transmitted to government actors to ensure early response. However, an effective system does not end with quick data collection, but must be coupled with strategic data collection, registries and data analyses. While women in these communities may participate as early warning monitors, they cannot do so without the infrastructure support, as well as capacities to respond. While technology can be an empowering instrument for the protection of the women and their communities, it must ensure connectivity for all.

Advancement in the use of digital technology has contributed to the invention of new ways to communicate. While there are challenges and risks especially for women in post-conflict communities, there are some opportunities to explore in this context. Particularly in developing communities, such as the Bangsamoro, where connectivity is a crucial factor to mobilize groups of women on the ground. It remains to be an area where further investigation as to how policy at both national and regional levels can support this particular area of engagement.

Policy Interventions Frameworks and Infrastructure: Gaps and Challenges

Framed under Article 11, Section 14 of the 1987 Constitution on recognizing the role of women in nation-building, and strengthened by the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act 9710), gender-responsive laws, policies and programmes have progressively been included in the national agenda. Areas such as women's health, violence against women and economic empowerment, have been addressed in legislation and programmes. On the other hand, information and communication technology paved the way for increased opportunities for women. However, while there have been laws passed to promote information and communication technologies, no specific law mentions the promotion and protection of women's rights, or enhancing their access to opportunities in this arena.

Republic Act 11165 or the Telecommuting Act sets the general policy within the private sector to develop programmes that may allow employees to have different work arrangements using any telecommunication and/or computer device. This law formalizes alternative work arrangements, which provides an opportunity for women to balance work and domestic concerns. The law, which was issued prior to COVID-19, may be improved to adapt to challenges faced by women during the pandemic.

Other legislations such as the Electronic Commerce Act (Republic Act 8792) and laws that support small business such as the Magna Carta for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (RA 9501) and the Barangay Micro Business Enterprises Act (RA 9178), all issued before COVID-19, may be amended to ensure that women's opportunities are brought to light. As a policy reform agenda, the concerns of many women engaged in e-commerce may also be included in the issues of women in the informal sector covered by the Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act (RA 8425).

COVID-19 highlighted the lack of access of many women to digital technology that was needed not only to respond to alternative work opportunities, such as online selling, but also to respond to issues on violence against women. In education, both students and teachers have limited or no access to devices or internet connections, thus disrupting learning. In this regard, addressing connectivity is crucial, but more importantly,

this highlights the necessary adjustments or new ways of delivering services in times of crisis.

On pending legislations, Senate Bill 1834 entitled Philippine Digital Workforce Competitive Act, which passed on third reading, aims to improve digital competence of workers. While not specifically mentioning women workers, the bill aims to "ensure digital inclusion by taking into account special needs of sectors such as, but not limited to, persons with disabilities (PWDs), indigenous peoples, senior citizens, individuals located in geographically-isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA), and other sectors." In this regard, the bill should include affirmative-action measures, such as allotting targets for women from different sectors, providing scholarships for skills improvement to be able to enter the workforce, or improving their capacities once they are employed or working.

Women entrepreneurs engaged in retail have less opportunity to scale up their businesses, because of their lack of access to technology (Foundation of Media Alternatives, 2021). Women who are engaged in microfinance or microinsurance should have access not only to devices and connectivity, but also the skills to navigate digital technology. This area of support is not included in current laws supporting small and medium-sized businesses. Governance mechanisms that are required by regulatory bodies involve use of digital technologies. Support should also be provided to those cooperatives and non-government organizations offering livelihood opportunities where most of the members and beneficiaries are women.

The Magna Carta of Women and the strategy of gender mainstreaming provide the framework for policies to be designed and implemented to enhance the inclusion of women in the digital technology world. The combined directions from relevant government instrumentalities such as the Department of Information, Communications and Technology, NEDA, the Philippine Commission on Women, the Department of Labor, the Department of Education, and the Commission on Higher Education and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, should be able to set policy guidance and programmes on education and skills development to signal that the women's agenda is on track.

The Bangsamoro Recovery Plan for 2020-2022 (BRP 2022) provided a roadmap on how the BARMM shall facilitate the adoption of new technologies and respond in the new normal. The BRP 2022 strategic framework has four thematic areas covering: 1) social development; 2) economic recovery; 3) infrastructure support; and 4) good governance. The response critically highlights the importance of accelerated strategic infrastructure implementation and improved access to ICT services. The plan intends to scale up BARMM's digital access, transformation and adoption of digital technologies to help the region overcome the impact of the pandemic, considering the need to adapt to digital technologies such as digital payments, online learning modalities, e-commerce and telehealth.

The Bangsamoro 12-Point Priority Agenda for 2023-2025 includes support for digital infrastructure and e-governance. For the region and its government, this means full digitalization of government operations, with centralized network system technology transfer from outside country contractors. The agenda shall be used to guide the region's budget, legislations and programming.

As part of the priority to advance local governance and service delivery, the Bangsamoro Ministry of the Interior and Local Government began its project titled Localize e-Governance for Accelerated Provision of Services. The goal of the project is to ensure service delivery across the Bangsamoro region. During the pandemic, the digitalization of service delivery and information dissemination, digitization of services across the BARMM has been a key driver in simplifying processes at the local level (Bangsamoro Information Office, 2022). Atty Sinarimbo, minister of interior and local government, noted that the project is "an attempt to pole-vault governance in the region." Thus, the project will simplify the services and bring it closer especially for the Bangsamoro people.

As part of ensuring data and analytics on the situation of poverty and service provision in the BARMM, a poverty and disaster registry is being proposed as part of the region's digital infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen an increase in the use of cash in emergency responses, especially in expanding the existing national social protection programme or Pantawid Pamilyang

Pilipino Program (4Ps). The implementation of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, provided two rounds of cash assistance to lower-income households, which included the existing beneficiaries of the 4Ps. The SAP introduced digital payments, which saw the DSWD partnering with six financial service providers, assigning beneficiaries through the temporarily established digital financial accounts (IPA, 2022). While recipients were generally satisfied with the use of the technology, account awareness and use remain low, creating divides in the access of the technology.

An information base is needed in order to ensure that the social protection measures are risk-informed and shock-responsive. A poverty and disaster registry is being proposed in Bangsamoro as an information base to capture how social protection programmes and instruments in the region can respond to the Bangsamoro people. Data and analytics are a crucial building block in effective response and in ensuring that the region and its responders have the capacity to use the new technologies including data entry, data management, and data mapping.

The proposed BARMM registry shall be a system that collects, stores, processes, transforms, creates and distributes information in the BARMM. Interoperability is also part of the proposed facets of the registry, that is information exchange amongst ministries, banks and payment institutions, as well as national government databases.

The country's pandemic response has created major economic setbacks for the region. In the Bangsamoro, structural challenges such as the lack of access to technology and lack of access to documents have created barriers to entry in the labour force. These must be addressed, along with the scaling up and building of capacity for digital technologies. This includes shifting to online platforms to provide services and to deliver information on the government response. The infrastructure in the Bangsamoro remains a serious problem as digital connectivity in terms of coverage, access, reliability and quality should be able to respond to ensure that industries are supported competitively.

Ways forward: Opportunities and Recommendations

The State policy that recognizes the role of women in nation-building and ensures fundamental equality of men and women before the law (Article II, Section 14, 1987 Constitution), and the prohibition of all forms of discrimination against women in the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act 9710), together constitute a foundation for gender-responsive measures in the area of digitization. Despite the absence of concrete areas of action in the Magna Carta of Women, its general provisions on non-discrimination, equal opportunities, decent work, education, among others may be used as guideposts in proposing measures that will improve women's participation in the digital era.

Investing in shock responsive systems that include both physical infrastructure and digital infrastructure such as poverty registries and digital databases, creating lasting impacts on the lives of women in the Bangsamoro. The improvement of digitalization in Bangsamoro should be a major agenda point for the intergovernmental body that discusses cooperation, among others, between the central government and the BARMM. The overall agenda of the BARMM in improving its economy, the status of women workers, and the protection of the communities must include improving participation in the digital sphere. This necessitates not only budgetary but also educational and technical support.

1. Opening spaces for financing and funding for capacity building that ensures women and locally led organizations are able to participate in the design, programming and implementation of programmes that allow them to create long lasting digital solutions for the region. Programmes and projects animated within the government response and structure must be made accessible to all through ensuring that those who participate have the skills needed to equitably engage in these spaces. Leveraging on existing women's community networks, equipping them with necessary skills to participate in government programmes and projects. Strengthening the capacity of women-led organizations implementing support.
2. Supporting legislative efforts that promote the inclusion of women in digitalization and flexible work arrangements that support their right to

work. Current laws that were passed prior to COVID-19 may need to be adjusted to respond to the increased reproductive work demands on women due to COVID-19. For example, RA 111651, while it promotes alternative work arrangements, is blind to gendered distinctions and lacks policy guidelines for private companies as they implement the law. There are also no specific guidelines for women in difficult circumstances, such as women in the Bangsamoro, that recognize the security and cultural nuances they experience. The same review on how to integrate gender may be done on other existing laws supporting women at work. Future legislation supporting communications and technology should also have the gender and conflict lens that benefit the situation of women, particularly in Bangsamoro.

3. The Bangsamoro Transition Authority or in the future, its parliament, may enact its own laws on alternative work arrangements, promotion of communications and technology, digital literacy, among others, that will be more responsive to the situation of women in the BARMM. Support to the BARMM by national government agencies should be ensured through mechanisms set up in the Bangsamoro Organic Law or Republic Act 11054, such as the different intergovernmental bodies that are mandated to coordinate efforts among the different relevant government offices.
4. Likewise, education programmes may be improved to promote more focus on digital literacy, and provide scholarships to open more opportunities for women in this regard, both in formal and non-formal education. This area may be pursued through direct programmes by government and private institutions, and also through legislation in light of the Magna Carta of Women. Support for women to have more access to technology and skills training may enable them to improve their own businesses, their access to work and their capabilities to retain their jobs or compete for promotion.

The right of women to pursue economic empowerment must be realized through combined efforts that will

ensure their access to knowledge, skills, and tools. The challenges to health or mobility brought by COVID-19 should not deter, rather, should challenge policy makers and support institutions to develop responsive ways of ensuring that women's economic participation will not deteriorate. Inclusive enjoyment of opportunities brought by digital technology means all women, including those in Bangsamoro and other geographically difficult-to-reach areas, will not be left behind.

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About the authors

Maria Cleofe Gettie C. Sandoval, J.D. works in the sector of gender, peace and security. started with a public interest or alternative law group providing legal support for different sectoral groups, focusing on the concerns of women among them. She joined the government as Director for Policy of the National Anti-Poverty Commission, Assistant Secretary for Policy, and later Undersecretary for Programs in the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP). She also served as the first Chief of Staff of Abanse!Pinay, the first women's party-list in the House of Representatives. She contributed to drafting laws particularly on women, notably the Magna Carta of Women and its implementing rules and regulations, and the IRRs of the Safe Spaces Act and the Anti-Torture Law. Currently, she is a member of the faculty of the School of Law, Ateneo de Manila University and the MA Program of Scholastica's College. She earned her Degrees on Bachelor of Arts, Major in Economics and Juris Doctor from the Ateneo de Manila University.

Diana Kathrina Fontamillas is a gender policy reform activist in the Philippines. She is currently a Gender Reform Consultant working on women's human rights, particularly on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), and Women, Peace and Security. As an activist, she co-wrote a bill for Adolescent Access to Reproductive Health Services to prevent adolescent pregnancies, as well as a national circular for the inclusion of VAWC Emergencies in the Philippines' Emergency Response System (911). She also co-wrote local level legislations on Violence Against Women which were adopted in several local government units. She is a member of the Young Feminists Collective, an organization of young women collaborating and advocating on feminist issues.

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Responsible: **Natalia Figge** | Project Director

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