



RESEARCH REPORTS

# PHILIPPINE WOMEN LOCAL HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP







# Bayinihan

Bayi in local humanitarian leadership

The Bayinihan Local Humanitarian Leadership Local Workshop forms part of the “Women in Local Humanitarian Leadership (WLHL)” research–based feminist project of Bayi Inc. in partnership with Oxfam Pilipinas. WLHL intends to surface a localized, decolonial, gender-transformative awareness and understanding of local humanitarian leadership experiences to eventually influence policies that will encourage and capacitate local humanitarian leaders who are women and from gender minorities.

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## Project Background

The gender gap in humanitarian leadership is a concern in the Philippines, considering how the country is no stranger to conflict and disasters. From 2015-2019, the Philippines has been ranked consistently amongst the top three most vulnerable in terms of susceptibility to climate change and multiple climate hazards in several global indices (Heintze et al., 2018; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2019; Paun & Acton, 2018). Forty seven percent of the country's population live in areas highly exposed to climate hazards such as earthquakes, tsunami, floods, tropical cyclones and drought. The latest Global Risk Report outlines the following perceived risks in the Philippines: "Prolonged economic stagnation, digital inequality, extreme weather events, employment and livelihood crises, failure of public infrastructure" (World Economic Forum, 2022).

**In the Philippines, local women's organisations, local government, civil society and community-based organizations are first responders in the time of conflict and disasters to fill in gaps that the national government are unable to address** (Oxfam, 2020; Martin & de la Puente, 2018). In urban poor communities, women have been observed to be over- represented in disaster risk management, although unpaid and not always in positions of authority (Ramalho, 2019, p. 130). Grassroots women's networks have also been active in gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience building efforts in communities (Villaceran & Jimenez, 2020). Capacitating local humanitarian actors and leaders should then be a priority, especially if building on the belief that, "preparedness and response actions before, during and after a crisis should be led by local humanitarian actors whenever possible" to ensure a more inclusive humanitarian process (Oxfam, 2020).

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This project seeks to address the observed gaps in research on women local humanitarian leadership, which has been noted in several studies (Black et al., 2017; Martin & de la Puente, 2018; Patel et al., 2020). It also seeks to challenge the conventional Western frames of reference in gender studies related to disaster risk reduction and management that focus on women due to the men-women binary.

Gender minorities (such as the bakla, LGBTQI, and non-heteronormative identities) not only face increased vulnerability during disasters but are also erased from reports and studies that should document their own humanitarian activities and efforts during times of conflict and disasters (Gaillard et al, 2017).

The project intends to surface a localised, decolonial, gender-transformative awareness and understanding of local humanitarian leadership experiences to eventually influence policies that will encourage and capacitate local humanitarian leaders who are women and from gender minorities. It specifically aims to:



Identify the barriers and opportunities for women and other gender minorities to take leadership positions in local humanitarian organizations or groups;



Expand and deepen informal networks of WOs, LGBTQI organisations, and women leaders in the humanitarian sector;



To develop an evidence-based practice model to understand the complex processes involved in capacitating and encouraging women and LGBTQI leadership in the humanitarian space;



Develop policy recommendations encompassing Women's Disaster Risk Reduction and Local Humanitarian Leadership agendas to influence National policy;



To ensure that intersectional feminist perspectives and principles are included and practiced in all stages of the project.





# INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

WLHL Local Workshops: Butuan and Siargao



Given its geographical context and location, the Philippines' is exposed to a myriad of natural hazards which are further aggravated by existing social and physical vulnerabilities. It is ranked as the eighth most disaster-prone country in the world in the 2021 World Risk Index.<sup>1</sup> The Inform Severity Index which measures the severity of humanitarian crises against a common scale, notes that the Philippines falls under high severity, and this is driven by conflict and displacement in Mindanao and Typhoon Odette/Rai.

It has been noted that during times of conflict and disasters, local women's organizations, local government, civil society and community-based organizations are first responders and fill in gaps that the national government is unable to address (Oxfam, 2020; Martin & de la Puente, 2018).

In urban poor communities, women have been observed to be over-represented in disaster risk management, although unpaid and not always in positions of authority (Ramalho, 2019, p. 130). Grassroots women's networks have also been active in gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience building efforts in communities (Villaceran & Jimenez, 2020). Capacitating local humanitarian actors and leaders should then be a priority, especially if building on the belief that "preparedness and response actions before, during and after a crisis should be led by local humanitarian actors whenever possible" to ensure a more inclusive and localised humanitarian process (Oxfam, 2020).

Advancing inclusive and gender-transformative local humanitarian leadership and action entails the re-examination of the diverse network of local actors on the ground, both formal and informal, and the dimensions of localisation: resources, agency, and ways of being (Baguios, 2021). At its core local humanitarian leadership and action is about the political right to self-determination (Slim, 2021). Understanding the ways of being of local actors represents a shift away from pre-defined frameworks and definitions, and allows an expansion of what constitutes local humanitarian action.

It is within this context that the present study aims to surface a localized, decolonial, gender-transformative awareness and understanding of local humanitarian leadership experiences to eventually influence policies that will encourage and capacitate local humanitarian leaders who are women and from gender minorities. It specifically aims to:



Identify the barriers and opportunities for women and other gender minorities to take leadership positions in local humanitarian organizations or groups;



Expand and deepen informal networks of WOs, LGBTQI organisations, and women leaders in the humanitarian sector;

<sup>1</sup> Based on data collected from existing quantitative information on crisis severity, the Inform Severity Index is composed of the following dimensions: impact of the crisis; conditions of people affected; and complexity of the crisis.





To develop an evidence-based practice model to understand the complex processes involved in capacitating and encouraging women and LGBTQI leadership in the humanitarian space;



Develop policy recommendations encompassing Women's Disaster Risk Reduction and Local Humanitarian Leadership agendas to influence National policy;



To ensure that intersectional feminist perspectives and principles are included and practiced in all stages of the project.

## Research Questions

1. How do local humanitarian actors in particular women, LGBTQIA+, and other marginalized identities experience and construct local humanitarian leadership and localisation? How does their lived experience as local humanitarian actors shape localized and decolonial humanitarian action?
2. What are the barriers to participation for women, LGBTQIA+, and other marginalized identities in local humanitarian action and leadership? What are the best practices?
3. How do gender and power norms, rules, structures, and dynamics shape local humanitarian actors' experience of LHL and DRRM?

4. How is humanitarian action and leadership shaped by global processes (i.e. colonialism, neoliberalism)?

5. What gendered roles and power relations emerge across the different sites/dimensions of DRRM (disaster prevention and mitigation; disaster Preparedness; disaster response; disaster rehabilitation and recovery) and how do these intersect with local humanitarian actors' identities and agency?

6. In times of disaster, what are the varying experiences of vulnerability and resilience and how do these intersect with local humanitarian actors' diverse identities?

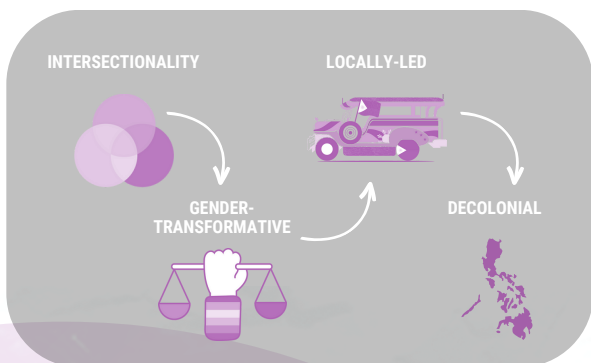
## Methodology

This study employs an arts-based research (ABR) approach which is defined as "research that uses the arts...to explore, understand, represent and even challenge human action and experience" (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014). Arts-based research is the adaptation of creative arts into various phases of research such as the development of the research focus and questions, research methodology, data collection and analysis, and dissemination and presentation of findings (Jones & Leavy, 2014; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Wang et. al (2017) identify the following ABR forms: visual art, sound art, literary art, performing art, and new media. These forms may be combined into a multiple forms approach.

This study’s community-led intersectional and participatory approach benefits from arts-based methods particularly in producing “multifaceted knowledge” and in creating new ways of knowing and knowledge-building (van der Vaart et. al, 2018).

In creating a space for the shift in power imbalances between researcher and research participants through the co-creation that takes place as researchers conduct research *with* the participants instead of *on* them (Coemans and Hannes, 2017 in van der Vaart et. al, 2018), the arts-based research approach supports this study’s objectives to surface a localized, decolonial, and gender-transformative awareness and understanding of local humanitarian leadership.

Notably, this approach is useful in “exploring the nuances of lived experiences and promoting dialogue” (Foster, 2012). The focus is on knowledge building that “reveals multiplicities, strengthens intersectional identities, creates accessibility, and tells the stories of those who have often been unheard or whose stories have been erased” (Flicker and Danforth, 2014) rather than seeking universal truths.



## Data Collection

Data collection for this study comprised of the following:

1. Interactive arts-based workshops
2. Key informant interviews

## Participants and Research Sites



Two interactive arts-based workshops were conducted in the following research sites: Butuan City, Agusan del Norte (October 18 to 19) and Del Carmen, Siargao, Surigao del Norte (October 20 to 21). Each workshop had a duration of 1.5 days.

A total of 18 participants participated in the two workshops (7 from Siargao; 11 from Butuan). Participants were recruited through a local coordinator and the Bayi Inc. network. The participants represented a diverse range of local humanitarian actors which included local women and LGBTQIA+ non-governmental organizations, organized youth groups, community or barangay local government units, and field offices of national government agencies.

Location	Date Conducted	Number of Participants	Age Range	Years of Work	Sector
Butuan City, Agusan del Norte	October 18 -19 2022	11	23 to 61 years	3 to 5 years	Local women and LGBTQIA+ non-governmental organizations, organized youth groups, community or barangay local government units, and field offices of national government agencies.
Del Carmen, Siargao, Surigao del Norte	October 20 - 21 2022	7	32 to 58 years	< 1 year to > 5 years	

**Interactive Arts-based Workshops:**



The arts-based workshops utilized literary, visual, and body movement arts methods, and were developed by two creative experts who also co-facilitated the workshops with two gender experts. Members of the research team were also present for documentation, observation, and assistance.

Each workshop started with introductions and reminders for the participants.

There were constant reminders about consent and cultivating a respectful and safe space. Day 1 of the workshop featured the following activities: 1) Body Movement Meditation, 2) Mandala-Making: Leadership Expertise and Vision, 3) Identity Narrative Map & Massage Connections. At the end of Day 1, participants had a wrap-up activity to summarize their key insights from each activity. Day 2 featured a final module on 4) Istorya Mapping: Experiences Before/After/During a Disaster and a synthesis of the entire workshop.

**Key Informant Interviews**

To build the case studies featuring specific participants identified from both workshops, a total of five (5) key informant interviews were conducted. Four (4) interviews were conducted in person while one (1) interview was conducted remotely, via Zoom. The KIs covered the following key areas: informant’s experience of social and gender norms, navigating humanitarian work, leadership and gender, and defining leadership.

## Day 1

### Activity I: Body Movement Meditation

The purpose of this module is to foster a safe space for participants to have body awareness and to locate and center their embodied experiences of consent, care, and pleasure. Participants were divided into groups for the processing session. It started with inquiries on self-awareness and one's body as a source of knowledge, then moved to awareness and interactions with others' bodies, and finally progressed to the participants' embodied experience of leadership and advocacy.



### Activity II: Mandala-Making: Leadership Expertise and Vision

Through mandala-making, the participants had the opportunity to explore and present their values and principles as local humanitarian actors and leaders, how they navigate powers and resources in their journey and work in local humanitarian action, the challenges they face as women leaders, the joys and community they have built, and finally the ideal vision for the future that they have for themselves and their communities.



### Activity III: Identity Narrative Map & Massage Connections

This activity prompted the participants to reflect on their lives and to uncover how they would view it if it were a movie. Participants reflected on their self-concept, their life experiences as multi-layered individuals, and how being local humanitarian leaders intersects with their many other identities. The massage connections activity was conducted in pairs. The facilitators explained that it was an exercise in care and given the nature of the activity, it was reiterated that consent must be given before proceeding with the massage.

Day 1 ended with a synthesis on the following topics: On caring for the self and body; on care and caring for each other; on feminist leadership. Participants had the opportunity to discuss these topics in breakout groups.



## Day 2

### Activity IV: Istorya Mapping: Experiences Before/After/During a Disaster

Divided into groups, participants created story maps that reflected their experiences before, during, and after a disaster. They were instructed to identify a humanitarian or disaster-related crisis that their community or organization faced and then plot the following: actors involved, systems and processes at work, challenges. The power distribution of these actors were identified with the use of colors from least power (green) to most power (red). Participants were grouped according to the nature of their work which ranged from community organizations, government, and service providers. During processing, participants were able to more closely examine their roles as actors and leaders, the gaps and challenges in DRRM, the challenges faced by women in leadership roles, and marginalized/invisibilized groups in humanitarian response and decision-making.



To end the workshop, participants had an open forum where they discussed the following: what changes they want to see and how to create an empowering space for women leaders in the humanitarian sector. A graduation ceremony took place to thank the participants and to distribute their certificates.

# FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

**WLHL Local Workshops: Butuan and Siargao**



## Defining “local” and “humanitarian”

The women leaders invited to participate in the workshop are situated in communities that have recently experienced natural disasters on top of navigating through the pandemic for the past two years.

During these major crises, the women leaders were central in mobilizing aid for their communities where government efforts were lacking, as they themselves were affected by the calamity. They represent the local space of humanitarian efforts, connecting those in need to funders and groups outside of the community.

The women leaders’ definition of “local” accounts for both the immediate communities that they serve, as well as the geo-political identity to which they belong. During the key informant interviews, one of the participants mentioned that what is “local” ranges from Butuan to Mindanao to Filipinos in general.

This is in contrast to the international funders and NGOs that are perceived as outside of the local. The participants view their relationship with international, “non-local” NGOs positively, with these groups providing aid and leaving the management and distribution of such to the women leaders. It was also apparent that women local humanitarian leaders do not perceive a divide between development work and humanitarian work, which aligns with findings from previous studies (Vera et. al, 2021).

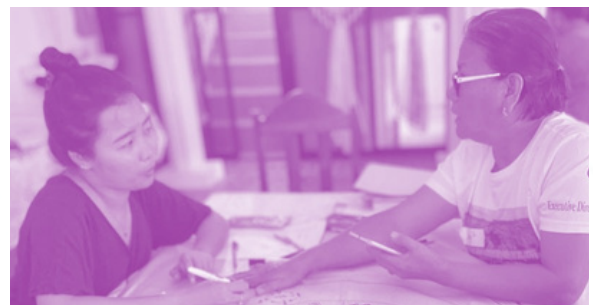
In a country like the Philippines that’s always in crisis, “the barrier between humanitarian work, on the one hand, and development and human rights work, on the other, was artificial” (Robillard, 2020).



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## Kinship and community networks as crucial resource and strategy

The women leaders’ localities are also defined by the lines of connection and kinship that they have built with the people in their communities. The stories that surfaced from the workshops and the interviews highlight how friendships have consistently sustained the women leaders through the perilous work that they do. Connections with groups and private entities elsewhere have resulted in projects/support beyond the operations of the local government, allowing women leaders to quickly address the urgent needs within their localities.



**Friendships within the communities have also sustained the women leaders emotionally through tough times and it is also through these that more women and queer people become enfolded in humanitarian work.**

This affective dimension is crucial in the kind of feminist transformative leadership that they practice. The happiness that they derive from being able to help and connecting with others may be marred by experiences of struggle and material lack, but it is at the core of their leadership journeys.

Participants have cited how fond they are of “pangungumusta” and “pakikialam,” strategies of maintaining friendships and gauging the conditions of their peers, and how these have helped them raise awareness in their communities regarding gender-based violence, mental health, and health and safety during the pandemic. Passion, care, and a genuine desire to help are infused in their leadership strategies.

These affective and material moves are also a manifestation of a broader strategy that women leaders take up in the face of insufficient support from government institutions: “diskarte.” They are used to finding their own ways through accessing funds and support wherever they can because the government often provides inadequate support in times of disaster. When Typhoon Odette hit Butuan and Siargao, women leaders had to rely on these informal connections to know the extent of their community’s needs.

Sometimes, these needs are so great that government aid is not enough, leading community members to be in conflict with one another. Women leaders manage these occasions through finding other sources of aid or by dividing what little they have so that at least everyone can receive something. The demands of their networks in times of crises have led the participants to be on-call for most of the day, juggling their formal employment with their community work.

These roles overlap most of the time and they pride themselves on being flexible and attentive to both personal and public needs.

### On Barriers to participation of women and members of LGBTQIA+ community



As previously established in the earlier section, women’s multiple roles prove to be a crucial point of analysis. This inextricable layer of their identity inevitably leads to the constant pressure to justify their participation in humanitarian work alongside their ‘primary’ responsibility as carers in their households.



Women leaders are doubly pressured to accommodate and 'balance' responsibilities from their multiple roles in humanitarian work and at home. While this balancing act is a source of pride from the standpoint of some participants, other participants shared their struggles.

“  
Sometimes, I cannot leave  
for work because I have to  
look after my children.  
”

This is a common sentiment among participants who have young children and are part of a double-income household. In certain instances, members of the family, such as husbands or children, do not support the leadership roles that these participants undertake. One participant recalled how, in the earlier period of her leadership journey, whenever she accepted new community projects to oversee, her husband accused her of chasing after increased recognition despite the already overwhelming workload.

She, however, asserts that her decision to engage in additional projects is an extension of her duty to her community. At the time of the workshop, she shared that her husband had become more supportive and accepting of her various community roles.

While the struggle to balance the duties of the household against community commitments is a



collective experience among participants who straddle the role of mother and wife, participants who are unmarried or who are married but are not parents express differing experiences regarding their multiple roles. While they still continue to fulfill their duties at home, participants who are married but have no children expressed that they have more freedom to focus on their humanitarian work. On the other hand, those who are single are still expected to contribute to their parents' household through the provision of domestic and economic support.

These diverse experiences and nuanced expectations of women leaders illuminate how roles that emerge from the domestic space impact the quality of participation in humanitarian work.

As more roles in the household- mother, wife, daughter, sister- get highlighted, the barriers to full and unhindered participation in humanitarian work also increase. Women humanitarian leaders overcome these barriers through individual and collective efforts. Their best practices include introducing time management systems and delegating tasks among other members of their organizations.

## On Gendered Roles and Power



Despite these barriers, women continue to be overrepresented in humanitarian work. Because humanitarian work is perceived to be women-dominated, the source of discrimination is not readily experienced as gender-based unless one identifies as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. Several communities in the country still hold conservative beliefs regarding gender.

One of the participants who identifies as bayot talks about the urgency to acknowledge and recognize the existence and value of the members of LBGBTQIA+ in advocacy work, specifically in humanitarian-related projects. During times of disaster, LGBTQ+ people are doubly vulnerable in evacuation centers due to bullying and lack of privacy.

According to her, it is imperative that she became famous so that society would look beyond the negative perception towards the LGBTQIA+. This would enable her to work successfully with other sectoral groups in addressing the needs of the community. Multisectoral engagement and network-building have been identified as best practices and sources of empowerment for these leaders.

Tapping into these networks to get financial and other necessary resources allows leaders to see through a project. Some leaders also take a sense of pride in their ability to be resourceful and reliable. However, while solidarity-building can be an empowering process, funding and just compensation continue to be a source of disempowerment for women and LGBTQIA+ leaders.

In the country, humanitarian work is often interchanged with volunteer work which leads to a lack of social protection or any mechanism to cover the basic social needs of humanitarian workers. There is a general acceptance that humanitarian work requires ingenuity and inventiveness in making ends meet. They liken this to the role of a mother who is in-charge of budgeting the household expenses, thereby extending the unpaid carework women take on at home.

In most cases, the women leaders have to resort to a common practice of self-funding their own projects. The normalization of this practice veils the reality that humanitarian-led projects, with women working on the ground, continue to be underfunded and deprioritized in local contexts.

The women leaders also highlighted the embodied dimension of their role. They recognize their bodies as sites of contested power.

“They recognize their bodies as sites of contested power.”

They are able to acknowledge rest as a crucial component of leadership and self-care while being aware of the embodied demands of their multiple roles and commitments. Moreover, empathy and emotionality are validated as sources of strength and knowledge. These affective iterations of their identities contribute to their capacity to be caring and successful humanitarian workers.

For the women leaders, humanitarian work remains to be a non-economic source of fulfillment and an extension of their faith. They derive joy, hope, and a sense of community among fellow women.

They are cognizant of the power of having a voice, but this perceived power is often coded in tokenistic forms that do not recognize their full capacity nor the various needs and contributions of their intersecting identities.

Existing institutions lack the vocabulary to fully appreciate the complexity of these identities and fall into the practice of essentializing “women’s” work. This ultimately restricts the range of possibility and creativity that the leaders can bring.

### On Vulnerability and Resilience across Diverse Identities

The LGBTQ+ community’s role in facilitating aid and bringing the community together during crises has also been underrepresented in scholarship and popular media. This is owed to regressive views about gender and sexuality in the country—

which impact not only the way that LGBTQ+ people are treated in public but also how they perceive themselves. How then do LGBTQ+ people take up leadership roles? One of the participants mentioned that she needed to prove that she was going to be more than the negative stereotypes that her community projected onto gay and transpeople.

She wanted to move away from statements like “bayot lang” to proudly saying “bayot ako”—fully embracing her own identity as she displays her capacity to lead and help her community. This deliberate taking up of space in public life is especially important for the LGBTQ+ community, given their unique struggles during times of crises.

One of the women leaders observed how gay and transgender people are often bullied in evacuation centers, citing how conservative ideas regarding gender and sexuality still permeate the community. They often have no immediate recourse for these instances of discrimination and harrasment, and LGBTQ+ people are rendered doubly vulnerable until they are able to return to their homes. It is due to these that women leaders have deliberately forged links with LGBTQ+ people to empower them to assert their own rights and capacitate them to lead in their communities.

Another group whose leadership journeys are marked by unique challenges is people with disabilities. The invisibility of people with disabilities in institutional awareness is apparent in the lack of mobility infrastructure and the complicated bureaucracy of acquiring documents.

These have pushed people with disabilities to be at the margins of public life, often doubting their potential for leadership. For one of the participants, it was her community that pushed her to take on more leadership roles after they saw how she was able to improve the lives of fellow people with disabilities. Leaders like her advocate for the deliberate and sustained recognition of the place of people with disabilities in disaster planning and management, rescue efforts, evacuation centers, and the distribution of aid.

Young women in leadership positions also carry a distinct experience of leadership. As young people, they are often tapped by other institutions to be on the ground whenever disasters strike. They are often tasked to distribute aid and perform crucial tasks in rescue efforts, often without the proper safeguards and insurance.



Despite their significant contributions, they are not always part of decision and policy-making, pushing young leaders to start projects on their own. In these initiatives, young women are able to have an impact on their communities on their own terms—

as they also gain recognition from the public and organizations. However, despite these developments, young women in leadership still feel uncertain about their capabilities in the company of more experienced leaders.

Traditional Filipino beliefs of young people being better off listening to their elders is still prevalent in their communities, and this thinking can be internalized by the youth. This is compounded by decision-making and leadership positions still being held predominantly by men.



In Siargao, 9 out of 11 mayors are men and even leadership positions in NGOs tend to be held by men, despite having more women members.



The few women leaders also often tend to be assigned work that concerns only women and children, as experienced by the participants who are in law enforcement and assigned to Violence Against Women and Children help desks. Though this is very important work, it also tends to limit the potential of women leaders by isolating their work to more conventionally gendered concerns.

Much like young women, they've expressed how they cannot afford to say no when they are given multiple tasks for the fear that they might be re-assigned or taken off their position. One member of the local police department expressed how she often had to personally fund some of the projects and programs assigned to her.

Women leaders try to solve the power imbalance by making their own organizations more gender-equal in their leadership roles. The work and experience of seasoned women leaders who have been engaging in the community for decades is crucial here.

These women have been instrumental in improving the gendered and material relations in the community over the years, despite having little or no pay for all the work that they do. One of the activities in the workshop asked the women leaders how much a humanitarian worker should be paid.



Most of them shied away from the question, citing how they can't put a price on their work because they view it as an expression of their desire to help their communities. When pressed for a price, the more experienced women leaders gave an amount that would pay for all the logistical needs and additional personnel that they need. It can be seen from these responses that women leaders are used to not being paid adequately for their work, and this lack of resources extends to their operations that they are used to soliciting from the community to supplement their projects. The material and emotional support they get from the community is what primarily has been sustaining these women leaders throughout the years.

# CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

WLHL Local Workshops: Butuan and Siargao



The participants proposed the following changes that would enable them to more sustainably continue their work as local humanitarian leaders:



a system of accountability and grievances in both government and non-government collectives;



education and raising awareness in the communities regarding gender and intersectional rights (class, disability, sexuality);



more spaces and opportunities for women to gather and get organized;



more deliberate integration of women from diverse backgrounds in decision and policy-making bodies;



dedicated insurance and emergency funds when humanitarian workers are deployed in times of crises;



dedicated funds from the LGU to help local humanitarian actors recover and facilitate giving aid during a crisis;



financial security through livelihood programs for humanitarian workers.

The invaluable contributions of Philippine women as local humanitarian leaders deserve greater recognition and support. Efforts must be made to address the challenges and barriers they face in their roles, such as gender-based discrimination and challenges, limited access to resources, lack of fair pay, and inadequate social support as first-responders. Capacitating women to be part of decision-making processes, to lead, and to participate in humanitarian interventions will not only enhance the effectiveness of aid delivery but also promote gender equality and social justice in the Philippines.



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# VALIDATION AND CONSULTATION OF FINDINGS

National Workshop with Women Local  
Humanitarian Leaders



The Bayinihan Women in Local Humanitarian Leadership National Workshop was held last November 24 to 25, 2022 in Quezon City, Metro Manila. It served as follow-up to the arts-based local workshops held in Del Carmen, Siargao, Surigao del Norte and Butuan City, Agusan del Norte last October. The workshop convened 25 participants from local CSOs and NGOs, local NGA offices, and LGUs. It also served as an avenue for validating the results from the local workshops.



## Day 1

### Activity I: Istorya Mapping

Similar to the activity conducted during the local workshops, the participants were asked to identify a humanitarian or disaster-related crisis that the participants' organizations have faced and to create a story map that reflected their experiences before, during, and after the disaster.

Using shapes, they were asked to plot the people and partners involved (circles) and relationships and processes (arrows). The participants were grouped according to their sector (LGU, CSO, local NGA). Afterwards, each group presented their maps.

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### Validation of Local Workshop Results

In this part, the findings from the local workshops were presented and opened for discussion and validation with the participants.

The following key themes were discussed: local humanitarian and feminist transformative leadership, barriers of participation for women and members of LGBTQIA+, gendered roles and power relations, and vulnerability and resilience in diverse identities.

### Discoveries

In this activity, participants were asked to write down three main takeaways and discoveries from the validation session. Afterwards, they were instructed to develop questions to be directed towards the three main groups of actors in the workshop: 1) international funders, 2) local government representatives, 3) civil service organizations. These questions were centered around the following concepts: power, challenges, exclusion and inclusion, resource generation and management, and sustainability. A discussion followed with each group providing their insights and recommendations.

## Day 2

### Activity II: Bayi Tableau

In this movement-based activity, participants were asked to convey their vision of an ideal environment for women humanitarian leaders before, during, and after a disaster. They were instructed to form their own human tableau interpreting this vision. Each team had a representative explain their tableau.

### Policy Recommendations

The next activity focused on the development of policy recommendations which were then presented and discussed by the group in a participatory approach.



## Findings

### Centering community narratives in humanitarian work

*"Dili ta paladesisyon* (Let us not make decisions on our own.)", one of the participants quipped during the sharing of stories about their work.

Her line refers to a common practice of assuming the needs of their communities in the context of humanitarian work. This statement underlines the need to be 'present in the field', as they put it, to fully assess the needs of the community.

According to the participants, they learned that the decision-making process in the humanitarian world cannot be dependent on assumptions.



To illustrate, one of the participants described how they introduced the survey method to understand the needs of their partner community. However, during the actual conversation with the members of the community, a different need that was not covered by the survey surfaced. This example further demonstrates the crucial role of "presence". Unless humanitarian leaders are actually present to listen to the lived experiences of the community firsthand, programs and other interventions will fail to address the challenges identified.

Because the community is seen as the source of grounded knowledge, community members are the experts. An example provided to illustrate this was the role of indigenous communities as experts of environmental sustainability. When conducting research, members of the indigenous community can guide and share local knowledge to researchers.

This dynamic is also apparent in humanitarian work. The participants emphasized how, during disasters, the affected community should not be treated as victims but as partners.

Here, humanitarian leaders' roles shift from decision-makers to facilitators of dialogue. Through dialogue and consultation, community members are empowered to express their needs and concerns as well as their capabilities. Their experiences provide the context for the design and implementation of the programs. To facilitate this, there should be an existing feedback mechanism designed to ensure that the needs and concerns are properly identified and documented.

However, as one participant pointed out, most LGUs do not have these mechanisms in place. In certain cases, some members of the LGUs participate in creating processes and mechanisms for feedback for compliance purposes only. Another challenge is the lack of participation from the community members themselves.



While there are attempts to reach out to the community in the context of needs assessment, external factors such as time poverty dictate the availability and willingness of community members to be updated or to share their experiences. This challenge points to the possibility that community members are not made aware of the importance of their perspectives. Moreover, members perceive their time as better spent engaging in income-generating activities. Allocating time to attend consultations and dialogues is not valued as productive.

From these perspectives, it is evident that these leaders value and recognize the role of dialogue in all stages of disaster preparedness. This recognition comes with the awareness that local knowledge, that is knowledge from the community itself, is key in designing and implementing caring and empowering solutions to humanitarian-related problems. To fully involve the community members in the design and implementation of successful humanitarian projects, creating an intuitive and inclusive feedback mechanism is necessary.

### **Building partnerships among different local humanitarian actors**

With participants representing different sectors such as civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local government units (LGUs), local offices of national government agencies (NGAs), what emerged is that there is a diversity of local humanitarian leaders and actors.

he discussions highlighted that more than defining who is local, what would be more impactful for their respective communities would be understanding the power dynamics resource generation and management, and ways to integrate and streamline the work of these different actors.

**Determining where LGUs, CSOs, NGOs, and NGAs intersect and how partnerships can be built will be crucial in maximizing the deployment of limited resources especially in the context of DRRM. This is where feminist community-led organizations' strength in mobilizing and organizing resources may come in as a best practice.**



In contexts where local humanitarian actors are unable to cooperate with each other due to several reasons including political differences, working with untapped community resources such as youth and senior groups, and church/religious organizations was surfaced as an effective strategy. One of the participants referred to this approach as “deconstructing the role of a public servant” and it centers a community-driven approach that also establishes trust and credibility across different groups in a community.

### **Women’s socialized roles and humanitarian work**

Women’s socio-cultural context and location uniquely position them to advance participative and consultative local humanitarian action. “Kamustahan” and “pakialam” are key features of how they build a relationship with their communities.

However, it was also highlighted that socialized gender roles of women such as motherhood and care work which dominant societal norms do not equate with leadership resulting in these roles being undervalued and overlooked also extends to how women’s local humanitarian action is perceived.

“Kamustahan ” and pakialam” as community carework is seen as essential to disaster preparation and response, but is undervalued, so women’s humanitarian work is not being justly recognized and compensated as paid, productive work. Instead, it is viewed as being driven by a “sense of sacrifice”. A participant voiced this sentiment stating “puro para sa bayan, paano naman para sa tiyan?”.

“Kamustahan ” and pakialam” as community carework is seen as essential to disaster preparation and response, but is undervalued”

## Recommendations

The national workshop validated the following recommendations gleaned from the participants of the local workshops in Butuan and Siargao through grouping the participants according to their leadership roles in the community: civil society organizations, government operations, and government policy bodies.



a system of accountability and grievances in both government and non-government collectives;



education and raising awareness in the communities regarding gender and intersectional rights (class, disability, sexuality)



more spaces and opportunities for women to gather and get organized;



more deliberate integration of women from diverse backgrounds in decision and policy-making bodies;



dedicated insurance and emergency funds when humanitarian workers are deployed in times of crises;



dedicated funds from the LGU to help local humanitarian actors recover and facilitate giving aid during a crisis;



financial security through livelihood programs for humanitarian workers.

# **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**National Workshop with Women Local  
Humanitarian Leaders**





In the Philippines, local women's organisations, local government, civil society and community-based organizations are first responders in the time of conflict and disasters to fill in gaps that the national government is unable to address (Oxfam, 2020; Martin & de la Puente, 2018). In urban poor communities, women have been observed to be over-represented in disaster risk management, although unpaid and not always in positions of authority (Ramalho, 2019, p. 130).

Grassroots women's networks have also been active in gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience building efforts in communities (Villaceran & Jimenez, 2020). Capacitating local humanitarian actors and leaders should then be a priority, especially if building on the belief that, "preparedness and response actions before, during and after a crisis should be led by local humanitarian actors whenever possible" to ensure a more inclusive humanitarian process (Oxfam, 2020).

At a policy level, the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010 or R.A. 10121 is the country's key directive for the institutionalisation of disaster risk governance across all levels. Considered as one of the most progressive DRRM laws globally, it introduces a key shift from a reactive focus on disaster relief and response towards a proactive approach that advances disaster risk reduction. However, even with its "whole of society" approach, its conception of gender does not explicitly include sexual and gender minorities .

1

In a case study review of disaster impacts on gender minorities, Dominey-Howes et al. highlights how existing social vulnerabilities enforced by stigmatization and discrimination are heightened during natural disasters with violations of personal space and privacy noted as a recurring experience.

“However, even with its “whole of society” approach, its conception of gender does not explicitly include sexual and gender minorities.

Marginalized groups are put at a higher risk of discrimination and violence during times of disaster. Evacuation experiences of the *baklas*, a “marginalised sexual and gender group in the Philippines whose identity encompasses both non-normative gender performativity and sexual orientation” were documented in a 2011 study in Irosin, a town in the Philippines frequented by typhoons.

The study revealed the *baklas* specific vulnerabilities related to evacuation centers where accommodations were usually categorized into binary gender identities which led to the loss of their privacy and subjection to prejudice and ridicule.

<sup>1</sup> LGBTQIA+ people of color during Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005; LGBTQIA+ community during the 2010 Haitian earthquake; aravanis of Tamil Nadu, India during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami; warias of Central Java, Indonesia during the 2014 Mt. Merapi eruption; and baklas of Irosin, Philippines during typhoons and evacuations.

Similarly, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a report from *The New Humanitarian* recounted the experience of a lesbian couple in the Philippines who were denied aid because they did not fit the local government unit's definition of a household (2020). Similar experiences took place across the globe prompting the UN's independent expert on sexual orientation and gender identity, Victor Madrigal-Borloz, to release the ASPIRE guidelines, a framework for inclusive COVID-19 response.

Based on these contexts, the following themes have emerged and provide a basis for further exploration and examination for policy recommendations:

**Redefining localisation and local humanitarian leadership through an intersectional, inclusive, decolonial, and gender-transformative lens.**

This entails a re-examination of the diverse network of local actors on the ground, both formal and informal, and the dimensions of localisation as conceptualized by Baguios (2021): resources, agency, and ways of being. At its core localisation is about the political right to self-determination (Slim, 2021). Understanding the ways of being of local actors represents a shift away from pre-defined frameworks and definitions, and allows an expansion of what constitutes local humanitarian action.

As stated previously, conceptions of the humanitarian-development divide may not be necessarily true on the ground, however,–

the humanitarian-development-peace nexus must respond to the specific context and nature of the crises, instead of local humanitarian action being boxed into this programmatic framework.

**Challenging the construction of gender and gender norms in localisation, local humanitarian leadership and action.**

This requires an analysis of power and gender relations at the community level which will the 1) differentiating impacts of disaster and conflict and 2) differentiating characteristics of women, men, and LGBTQIA+-led local humanitarian action to emerge. The construction of Filipino men's masculinities and how these are reinforced or changed during crises must be examined. This would allow a more nuanced understanding of how local solutions are constructed and how to better support these

**Moving towards a feminist crisis management lens in DRRM.**

Aside from diverse local humanitarian actors, incorporating feminist approaches such as community care and collective action are equally important and may represent a shift from what is traditionally considered as disaster response (i.e. militarized responses, gender-blind and culturally insensitive relief operations, etc.). The examination of gendered roles and relations across the different dimension of DRRM in the Philippine context (disaster prevention and mitigation; disaster Preparedness; disaster response; disaster rehabilitation and recover)–

is crucial in understanding the representation, participation, decision-making powers across different local humanitarian actors, particularly those in marginalized sectors and communities. The Bayinihan Women in Local Humanitarian Leadership National Workshop was held last November 24 to 25, 2022 in Quezon City, Metro Manila. It served as follow-up to the arts-based local workshops held in Del Carmen, Siargao, Surigao del Norte and Butuan City, Agusan del Norte last October. The workshop convened 25 participants from local CSOs and NGOs, local NGA offices, and LGUs. It also served as an avenue for validating the results from the local workshops.

## Methodology

The findings and recommendations stated here are gleaned from the Local Humanitarian Leadership Workshops held in Butuan, Agusan del Norte and Del Carmen, Surigao, followed by the National Local Humanitarian Leadership Workshop held in Quezon City, Metro Manila. All three workshops used arts-based methods in generating ideas, beliefs, experiences, and aspirations for local humanitarian leadership.

## Recommendations

The national workshop validated the following recommendations gleaned from the participants of the local workshops in Butuan and Siargao through grouping the participants according to their leadership roles in the community: civil society organizations, government operations, and government policy bodies.



a system of accountability and grievances in both government and non-government collectives;



education and raising awareness in the communities regarding gender and intersectional rights (class, disability, sexuality)



more spaces and opportunities for women to gather and get organized;



more deliberate integration of women from diverse backgrounds in decision and policy-making bodies;



dedicated insurance and emergency funds when humanitarian workers are deployed in times of crises;



dedicated funds from the LGU to help local humanitarian actors recover and facilitate giving aid during a crisis;



financial security through livelihood programs for humanitarian workers.

The civil society organizations stressed the importance of early interventions in the education and participation of young women in community building. An example of this would be how the Department of Education can more strongly encourage student governments to create humanitarian groups that can broaden the horizons of young people, showing them that they should go out of their comfort zone to contribute to their communities. For these collectives to be sustainable for women across different backgrounds, the CSOs also recommend that there be livelihood programs for LGBTQIA+ and PWD that align with their skills and will-

allow them to become experts in the field. This would also be a significant manifestation of social enhancement where PWDs are included in mainstream society. To help in the cascading of support to these collectives, the CSOs also recommend that there be an updated directory of all the organizations in the community to facilitate a more direct connection between them and policy-makers.

They also emphasized that carers should also be cared for. This care manifests through rest, safety and privacy, and government-sponsored insurance and protections. They stressed that there has to be safe and private spaces for women to gather in their workplaces. These include providing extended maternity leave and psychosocial services for pregnant women (especially post-partum). The government should also provide insurance and emergency funds for humanitarian workers.



The government operations group extends this recommendation for humanitarian workers' insurance, transportation, and food allowance by specifying where it must come from:

the Government Service Insurance System and charged to the Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centers or the local government offices. Humanitarian leaders in government positions also stressed that they and their family members should be prioritized in scholarship and livelihood programs, as well as in capacity development planning, specifically towards gender and development, by the local government offices.

The group from government policy bodies framed their recommendations through the proposed bill to amend RA 10121 Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act that provides incentives to responders, volunteers, and other workers before, during, and after disasters.



Before disasters, there should be enough training, as well as an annual medical check-up, for volunteers. During disasters, they should be given necessary protective gear along with a quick response fund that will cover hazard pay, transportation, and food allowance. After disasters, the insurance coverage for volunteers must cover death and addressing mental issues, such as psycho-social intervention for post-traumatic stress. Lastly, the group recommended that an oversight committee should also be established.

Over-all, the women leaders foreground education and capacity building in their policy recommendations. They stress the need for mechanisms in their local governments and communities that would embolden and educate young women and LGBTQ+ people to continue the path of leadership the women leaders currently occupy. These can manifest through more feminist leadership workshops and making modules that arise from these available to more members of the community. For these mechanisms to be sustainable, practices of caring for the self and one another must be embedded firmly in these mechanisms. Spaces where women can come together and practice leadership need to be safe and free from gender-based violence.



Connections with policy and education experts outside of their communities would also enhance existing capacity building systems. Another facet of the sustainability of these recommendations is through the accessibility of the Gender and Development fund at the local level, which may also be helped by the existence of a national law that would intersect with the needs and requirements of the local government units. Ultimately, the women leaders concluded that government and non-government bodies must be informed by a feminist framework that can help implement existing and target policy recommendations.

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